

BANDWAGON

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2010



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The Journal Of The Circus Historical Society

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FRED D. PFENING III

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

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OUR FRONT COVER

When sixteen year old Fred D. Pfening, Jr. joined the Circus Historical Society in 1941 he was the thirty-sixth person to do so. While Don Smith edited the organization's original bulletin, called *Spec*, the seventeen year old Pfening put out the first issue using the *Bandwagon* title the next year.

He became CHS president in 1958, heading a group of "Young Turks," as Joe Bradbury liked to call them, members who transformed the *Bandwagon* from a magazine that dabbled in circus history and members' social activities in equal amounts to a journal devoted to the history of the American circus. When he was thirty-six he took over the editorship of the publication. The next year he steered the organization through a financial crisis. At the end of 1963, after the CHS's bank account was restored, he decided to not continue as president.

Year after year, issue after issue,

Pfening turned *Bandwagon* into the premier American circus history publication. He assembled a huge reference library of circus ephemera and documentation that he used to illustrate articles. Rarely did he have difficulty finding the right letterhead or lithograph for a story. An avid photographer, he collected a massive number of pictures, thousands of which were published in the magazine.

At sixty-four he bought a computer and taught himself to use a sophisticated software program to edit *Bandwagon* electronically. He followed innovations in desktop publishing and bought any number of computers, printers, scanners, and new software to keep up with technological change, and improve the magazine.

Health problems dogged him in the last decade. He successfully battled prostate cancer, skin cancer, high blood pressure and diabetes, never complaining. His energy level began to flag in the

last few years, although he continued his interest in the family business, had lunch with his friends, and, of course, worked on *Bandwagon*. It was his full-time job the last twenty years of his life, and he loved every minute of it. More than anything else, the *Bandwagon* gave his life purpose and meaning.

Pfening's health problems intensified this year. In May he had a mild heart attack and had to have surgery to upgrade his pacemaker. He tired easily and had bad days. In early July he broke his hip, again making it through surgery. By this time, however, he had weakened to the point that he could hardly stand. He spent most of July and August in a rehabilitation center. After finally conceding that physical therapy wasn't going to make him ambulatory, he returned to his home of sixty years where he and his wife Lee, both wheelchair bound, had full time caregivers.

It became apparent to him immediately after coming home that he and Lee needed to be in an assisted living environment where they would receive better care. He reluctantly moved to one in early September. He was occasionally disoriented and confused in his last days. He had a stroke or heart attack while being dried off by three caregivers after a shower on 6 September, Labor Day. They said he just slumped over and was gone. It was his third day at the care facility. His wife and elder son were present.

The photograph on this month's cover shows Pfening on the morning of the 1992 Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee dressed in his wardrobe, ready to ride in one of the owner's carriages with friends John and Ginny Goodall. Pfening had many of the happiest days of his life in Milwaukee during the parades where he camped in the Circus World Museum's office tent. Here he decided the fate of the free world with his buddies Tom Parkinson, Chappie Fox, Paul Ingrassia, Richard Reynolds, and a hundred other co-conspirators including Bobby Gibbs, Dave Hale, Johnny Herriott, Buckles Woodcock, and Tommy Hanneford.

Although an era ends, *Bandwagon* continues as Pfening's son, who has served an apprenticeship as long as Prince Charles's, has agreed to publish the magazine for the foreseeable future. To this, his father would doubtless say, as he often did, "Carry on." Fred D. Pfening III

OUR BACK COVER

This lithograph was printed by Russell-Morgan and Company of Cincinnati for the hometown John Robinson Circus in 1909. As the sharp-eyed will notice, this bill has been cross lined. After the original title was cut from the poster, a new title was pasted to the top of the remaining original. Strange as it sounds today, in the first third of the twentieth century it was common practice for a litho house to paste over or replace the title of the circus for which the image was printed with the new show's name.

In 1911 the Famous Robinson Shows was founded by former carnival owner Daniel R. Robinson, known as Danny. By 1915, when it appears this image was actually posted, the show was owned by Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, still in their pre-American Circus Corporation days, but moving up fast.

This must have been a striking poster in its day, as it is in ours. Its design contrasts with the realistic style that dominated circus art at the time. While the theme of a child's imagination running wild on circus eve had appeared on other posters, mostly notably on the Barnum & Bailey's Child's Dream bill in 1898, none had quite the surreal motif, busyness, and plain craziness and chaos of this poster. Note the difference between the Victorian mother and daughter and the madness going on behind them. Nevertheless, the richness of the child's vision of the next day speaks to the importance of circus day a hundred years ago. Original in Pfening Archives.

CORRECTION

In the article "Flying Fishers of Bloomington, Illinois" by Steve Gossard in the May-June *Bandwagon*, it was erroneously noted on page 28 that Bob Musselman's wife Maxine died in 1940. In fact, Mrs. Musselman's given name was Francis (alternatively spelled "Frances"). Maxine Musselman was the daughter of Bob and Francis. Also, the personnel in the photo on page 23 were misidentified. The woman listed as Jennie Ward Todd on the far left is in fact Dorothy Musselman, and the man listed as Alex Todd, second from right, is William Beckman. Jennie and Alec Todd were on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1914 as part of the Flying Wards act.

CHRISTMAS ADS

Why not take an ad in the November-December *Bandwagon*? It's an opportunity to send Holiday Greetings to friends in the circus community, share something about yourself, pay tribute to one of our brethren, avoid the time and cost of mailing Christmas cards, and show support for the Circus Historical Society. The Christmas issue is by far the most expensive of the year, and advertising revenue helps defray costs. Ads are encouraged from individual members as well as from circuses, museums, libraries, suppliers and other circus-related organizations and groups.

Black and white ads are \$100 for a full page, \$60 for a half page, and \$35 for a quarter page. Color ads are \$200 for a full page, \$120 for a half page and \$70 for a quarter page. We can create an ad to your specifications if you don't have camera-ready copy. Advertisements can be emailed to fpfening@pfening.com or mailed to *Bandwagon*, 1075 W. Fifth Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43212.

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties). (Signed) Fred D. Pfening III, Editor and Publisher. 27 October 2010

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The Ringling-Barnum Circus in Color from 1941 to 1956

The Braathen Kodachromes in Milner Library's Special Collections at Illinois State University

by Bill McMillin

Of course, the more you know of the background and history of the items you accumulate, the more interest they will hold for you and the more value they will possess in a museum later. The circus world is a romantic one, filled with color and pageantry, deeds of daring and acts of heroism, adventure and excitement. Once you begin to study its past and enjoy its present you will be dreaming of its future, and collecting circusiana will become an itch of more than the proverbial seven years duration. Mr. and Mrs. Sverre O. Braathen, The White Tops, Waubesa Beach, Wisconsin June 7, 1954¹



The first Kodachrome images of the big show in the collection begin in August 1941 in Milwaukee. The circus then moved on to Madison and Braathen followed. The above image was taken August 17, 1941. Of this one Braathen writes "Looking up midway at main entrance or front door. Lot at end of North Street, Madison, Wis." Here we see the sharp contrast and saturated colors that were typical of Kodachrome at the time. This is perhaps one of the first color images of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey big top.

Sverre O. Braathen has quite a reputation among circus fans. While most circus fans love circus, Braathen cherished the details of daily circus life and sought to document and preserve them. Not

only was Braathen a circus enthusiast, he became involved in performers' lives, writing and visiting them at every chance, documenting their routes, and keeping meticulous records of his photographs, correspondence, and other items. This has resulted in not only one of the most stunning, full-color, visual records of circus from a time that is now mostly experienced in black and white. It has given us records of the people, places, animals, acts, costumes, and culture of circus from the 1940s and the ability to link these photos to additional historical documents. While Braathen photographed and documented many shows during this time period, the images and notes from the Ringling show are most extensive, so

the Ringling images will be the focus of this article.

"With Wisconsin the hub of circusdom, it is altogether fitting that we Badgers bestir ourselves and garner the relics of this phase of our history ere Time's ever busy fingers scatter them to the winds of Forgetfulness (sic)." Braathen began his collection in 1932 when he drove to Baraboo to seek out Judge Adolph Andro, then owner of the old Ringling winter quarters. Andro allowed Braathen to fill his car with "old route books, advertising booklets, press books, lithographs, hand bills, tickets, correspondence, et cetera." He made many other trips to haul the items to his home. It was at this time that Braathen and his wife decided to build their circus room. This was to be a living museum dedicated to his passion. It soon contained thrones, wagon wheels, bale rings from the big top, and countless other pieces of circus history. Braathen began to network with circus collectors all over the world, purchasing estates, trading, and befriending circus people to acquire the various elements of his vast collection. Among these items were "a charred remnant of a floor board from the Ringling-Barnum tent which burned so tragically in Hartford, Connecticut in 1944 . . . the tiny bell lost from an elephant's wardrobe now hangs suspended from the 'spec' wagon wheel that forms the chandelier for our circus room, a piece of hide from an elephant that turned killer and, in turn, had to be killed is ours through the thoughtfulness of one of our C.F.A. friends, the pair of shoes Carla Wallenda wore the very first time she walked the high wire at the age of just-past-two is ours because her world famous mother Helen thought of us that night as she kissed her beautiful star-to-be daughter and tucked her safely into bed." The chandelier and shoes, in addition to countless other pieces of circus history, are now part of the Milner Library's Special Collections at Illinois State University. In addition to these items, Braathen wrote that his collection

"Lot scene showing the side show panels, menagerie top and four pole big top. Lake front lot, Milwaukee, Wisc. July 24, 1948."



"One of the side show barkers. Chicago, July 30, 1949."

included "about 25,000 pictures and photographs, dating back to 1850. . . . Several thousand of these we have ourselves taken on lots throughout the country. Some 6,000 are colored slides which we have taken on our trips along the sawdust trails since 1941. These we have enjoyed sharing with groups of people all over southern Wisconsin during the 'off season.' They capture the glitter and glamour that is circus better than any other medium."

Through the first three decades of the 20th century, color photographic films, prints, and processes struggled to imitate reality. Many processes were tried with varying levels of success. A color photograph essentially consists of three black and white photos layered on top of each other and exposed together. Each layer has a different color filter or filtering element on the film: red, green, and blue. Each black and white layer is only exposed to light produced by one color. In some processes, dyes are present which then cling to the silver particles during development, leaving three images, one each of magenta, cyan, and yellow. When printed or projected, this re-creates the colors that were originally exposed to the film.





"Bella Attardi in blue spec wardrobe. La Crosse, Wis. July 28, 1948."

In 1935, two independent researchers, Leopold Mannes and Leo Godowsky, developed a color positive (slide) process in which three images were shot through three filters as other color processes were, but the dyes were not added to the image until the processing stage. This resulted in more vibrant, realistic, and more permanent colors than any photographic process available at the time. The Eastman Kodak company began selling this film as Kodachrome. The price of the film was well out of the range of most amateurs, but since Eastman Kodak owned all processing facilities, the price of developing the slides was included in the price of the film. While most color dyes even today begin to fade after 20 years, the dyes in Kodachrome remain stable for at least 100 years, resulting in images that look as good today as when they were taken decades ago.

While photography was becoming more widespread and accessible, it still required a great deal of time and patience to learn the necessary skills and purchase the necessary equipment. The single lens reflex camera was not widely used until the 1950s, meaning that photographers had to use rangefinders and dual lens reflex systems to focus. These systems did not show the photographer the image exactly as it appeared on film, but rather a close approximation, making it difficult to focus and properly frame the image. Further-

more, through-the-lens metering was years away, forcing photographers to carry a separate light meter to measure exposures. When shooting slide film it is especially important to get the exposure right because adjustments cannot be made later as they can during the printing process of negative film. Slide film, especially in its early days, has always been rather unforgiving with regard to exposure.

By the 1940s, Kodachrome had become widespread among serious photo hobbyists, including circus enthusiast Sverre O. Braathen. The cost at the time was \$5 per roll, roughly \$70 today. These were not snapshots to be taken carelessly. Each click of the shutter was a small investment. Given the difficulty and cost of shooting Kodachrome during this time, Braathen's collection of more than 4000 images of Ringling and thousands of images of other circuses, this collection is truly a historical treasure.

Beginning in the 1930s, when each circus season began, Braathen and his wife Faye would head out on the road. From their home in a Madison suburb, they would usually pick up a circus in the Midwest and follow it for as many shows as they could. Some years, they would travel to Pennsylvania, Ohio, and beyond. Most shows they attended were in and around Chicago and Milwaukee. But the Braathens didn't just go to the circus. They became a part of it. Staying in hotels near the grounds, rising early to see the trains unloaded, Sverre took notes about how they were loaded and unloaded, how the cars were transported to the grounds, how the show was put up, and how it was broken down and moved to the next city. He talked to the banner squarers and publicity men, the cooks, the laborers, the fans, and, of course,

the performers. The Braathens became part of the lives of circus people, corresponding with them, providing legal advice (Braathen practiced law when he wasn't on the road with the circus), and becoming close friends with fans, performers, and their families.

Braathen had taken many black and white photos in the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, the speed of black and white pictures, along with flashes, permitted photography in dark conditions of fast-moving subjects, so photography inside the big top had become fairly common. While black and white film at the time was often manufactured with ISO (speed) ratings as high as 200, color photography had a long way to go. At the time, Kodachrome had a speed of 10, making it suitable only for photographing in bright sunlight.

The speed of Kodachrome placed significant limitations on which parts of the circus could be photographed. While photographers could shoot black and white inside the big top and capture legendary performers, Kodachrome could only be used outside on sunny days. Even overcast weather made it difficult to shoot in this remarkable new medium. So while Braathen's Kodachromes give us an unprecedented full-color record of the train yards and midways, the performances inside the big top are a glaring absence in the collection. In the mid-1950s Braathen began shooting Kodak's

Ektachrome film, which had a much higher speed so he was able to capture some images inside the big top. Unfortunately, Ektachrome's colors are not nearly as stable as those of Kodachrome, so these images have faded significantly. The Kodachromes, however, are just as vibrant as the day they were processed.

The colors of Kodachrome vary with exposure. This is largely due to the contrast of the images. Because of the low speed of Kodachrome, photographers had to shoot in bright light. Direct sunlight is the ideal condition for shooting. Unfortunately, direct sunlight also causes strong shadows and a wider range of contrast than light that has been filtered by clouds. Kodachrome can capture detail in exposure values that in a range of about 5 exposure values. Anything that is beyond this range loses detail in the shadows or highlights. The human eye, after adjustment, can see a range of up to 20 exposure values. Colors in Kodachrome, particularly reds and blues, often appear saturated when in bright sunlight. Flesh tones often look unrealistic. When the sky is overcast, however, the contrast is reduced and Kodachrome's limitations are not so apparent. The range of exposure values when the sky is overcast renders images that are closer to what the human eye perceives. Colors have less contrast and, therefore, a more natural gradation between tones.

Most of these slides were shot in bright sunlight because it was the only time that Kodachrome could be shot at a sufficiently high speed to not cause camera shake with the aperture closed down enough to allow a reasonable depth of field. When the aperture is wide open, it allows more light to come in and, consequently, shorter exposures are possible. However, the depth of field (the range of space in which subjects are in sharp focus) is reduced. As a result of this, many photographers who were shooting Kodachrome at the time (Braathen included) shot their subjects from a significant distance, rarely coming close enough for the short depth of field to become apparent. Most subjects are at least 10 feet away, squinting into the bright sun. Some overcast days were still bright enough to shoot Kodachrome and in these images the brilliant, realistic colors of which Kodachrome is capable of producing really shine through.

Braathen wasn't just a great photographer and circus fan. He had the foresight to know how valuable even the minutest of details would be to historians and circus fans of the future. Obviously, he enjoyed keeping meticulous records for himself, but he also went to great lengths to keep his collection and records in order so that future generations could share his memories. Each slide in the collection is numbered and three notebooks contain typed notes explaining who and what is in each image, along with Braathen's comments and observations.

The following images are only a glimpse into the world of the Ringling-Barnum Circus, but thanks to Braathen's passion and

hard work, there are thousands more such images, stories, and memories waiting to be relived. Photo captions taken directly from his record book are in quotations.

"Florence Begin, a production girl from New York City. Close up view in ménage number and sitting in a buggy. Black top lot South of Soldier's Field, Chicago, Ill. July 20, 1950. Show always played this lot for nine days except one year when it went into suburbs but shake down was worse there. I was always told that the show was shaken down for enuf to fill six houses of the 18 given in Chicago every year." This refers to the free passes that had to be given out to local officials in order to avoid legal troubles. As Herb DuVal, the show's lawyer, said of one town "Big demands here for tickets and if we don't give 'em, we don't show. It is the only way to eliminate the bugs."²





"Ala Naitto, tight wire, close up. The Naitto troupe was one of the best wire acts of all time. Ala could do a forward somersalt (sic) and never miss the trick. They were part Chinese and Russian. They were in Honolulu when it was bombed and they were thot (sic) to be Japs and were locked up until they identified who they were." Probably North Street lot, Madison, Wisconsin, September 11, 1942.

"Lou Bader, a trombone player from Springfield, Ohio, and who played in Merle Evans band more than thirty years and the best trombone player he ever had. In finale wardrobe. Charleston, West Va. July 15, 1954." In this image, we can see the effects of shooting such a slow film when the subject is extremely close. Due to the low film speed, Braathen had to shoot with the aperture open. This resulted in a small depth of field which is why the background is so blurred. The subject was in the shadows here, resulting in a smooth gradation of tones and more realistic flesh tones.





"Lietzel Pelican sitting and Lou Jacobs, close up view. State fair park lot, West Allis, Wis. Aug 19, 1945. The Pelican family lived in Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee." Lietzel was named after her aunt, Lillian Leitzel, one of the greatest performers in Ringling history.

"Jimmy Armstrong, clown and Pinita del Oro, a very excellent aerialist, Parkersburg, West Va. July 13, 1954. This was a very hot and humid day and one of worst we had ever been on a circus lot."



"A photo fan shooting a picture of four girls in Changing of the Guard wardrobe in front of a baggage wagon. Chicago, August 11, 1946." This photographer shows where most photography was at this point. Large-format cameras, black-and-white film, and large flashbulbs were the norm. Setting up a shot required a great deal of preparation. The photographer had to set up the tripod, measure the light, focus underneath the black cloth, insert the film, and quickly release the shutter before the scene changed. This made shooting moving subjects very difficult. While Braathen's 35mm camera was much simpler, getting a correct exposure in sharp focus was not easy. Of the Changing of the Guard spectacle, Braathen wrote "This was one of the prettiest production numbers the show ever had. Music was Pageant of Progress March by Fred Jewell, a great composer of circus music, baritone player and director." He also noted that because it was so successful, this was the only number that appeared in the spec more than one year in a row.



"Lou Jacobs, a very good clown. He was in green wardrobe used by the webb (sic) sitters who held the webs for the girls that worked on them. Madison, Wis. Sept. 8, 1943." In the background we see other members of the troupe getting ready, some in clown makeup. Many performers filled multiple roles in the show and parade. Lou Jacobs was often photographed in many different wardrobes on the same day, supporting different acts.



"Emmett Kelley sketching a picture of Lee Wallenda. Emmett was an excellent cartoonist. State fair park lot, West Allis, Wis. Aug. 17, 1945." Kelly was unique in that he didn't have to change costumes or participate in the acts the way other clowns did. His hobo outfit was unorthodox, but it was such a hit that he was free to roam around performing his own act and interacting with audience members, often tying his jokes into other acts.³



"Red cage with two bulls, State Fair park lot, September 6, 1943." Photo taken in Milwaukee.



"Dick Conner, former Ringling Barnum clown and Charles Bell, North Street lot, September 10, 1942." Photo taken in Madison, Wisconsin.



"A clown with dehydrating props. State Fair Park lot. September 8-10, 1944. This was the year of the Hartford fire. Business very poor in Milwaukee because of a severe Polio epidemic."

"Bella Attardi and Martha Hunter with the baby gorillas. Martha Hunter is the caretaker for them. Chicago, July 23, 1950. When the Ringling show obtained its first gorilla it died within a short time. When they obtained Gargantua John Ringling North had constructed an air conditioned cage with a uniform temperature and it lived for many years and was one of the greatest attractions that the show ever had. Later they obtained a second one."

An animal lover named Gertrude Lintz had experience nursing a sick gorilla back to health, so she was contacted in 1931 when a ship arrived carrying a wounded baby gorilla. Reportedly, a sailor wanted revenge on the captain of the boat, so he sought to destroy its most valuable

cargo, the gorilla, by spraying it with nitric acid from a fire extinguisher. The gorilla was named Buddha, or Buddy for short.

As he healed, his nostrils "almost disappeared with his injury. His mouth was drawn up on the left side, exposing some teeth and giving him the pronounced and permanent sneer that was to become his trademark--probably the most valuable animal sneer in recorded history."⁴ In 1937, John Ringling North purchased the full-grown Buddy for \$10,000 (other reports indicate that it was \$20,000) and renamed him Gargantua.

Due to fears about rationing and the economy as World War II escalated, the Norths decided that Gargantua alone would not be enough of a draw. They needed something more sensational. They found a female gorilla in Cuba and decided to stage a gorilla wedding, to be followed by a honeymoon tour during the season, although they never did mate. Since Gargantua died in 1949, these two may have been intended to replace him.

"Novelty racks in foreground and elephants on the lake shore in back ground, lake front lot, Milwaukee, Wis. July 23, 1951. . . . Novelties are called garbage by all circus people and that is a correct name for the junk sold at high prices and forced upon the youngsters by the butchers."



"Victoria Torrence in spec costume. She did a double swinging perch act with her husband. In a later year she fell to her death in Madison Square Garden in New York. Thereafter her husband buried the Ringling with her and never performed again. Milwaukee, Wis. Sept. 8, 1944." *Billboard* magazine of May 19, 1945 carried the story of her death: "Act was spotted late in the show with the Clarkonian and Royal flying trapeze acts but finished alone with all spotlights centered on them above the center ring. Finale of the act is the descent. Torrence, with one arm securely held in a loop, hooked his left foot firmly in crotch of his partner who assumed a horizontal position with her extended legs crossed with Torrence's right foot planted on her ankles to keep her balance. There are several versions as to what happened, but veteran circus performers who witnessed the accident attributed the fall to a sudden jerk, caused by the rope on



which the pair were being slowly lowered to the ring being caught in the pulley block." The article goes on to describe her funeral where "officials of the show shared pews with roustabouts, clowns, midgets, giants and performers."⁵ Very few acts were captured in color during this time. There simply was not enough light in the tent, so Braathen would often shoot performers in their spec (spectacle) wardrobes outside the tents and describe their acts in his notes.



"Emma Castro, Spanish, close up view with a horse in Circus Serenade spec wardrobe. Chicago, July 21, 1951."



"Josephine Berosini the best girl high wire walker. Youngstown, Ohio, July 9, 1955. The show played to very poor business that year because someone convinced John Ringling North that he should not spend money for lithographs and just use small newspaper ads. He said the show was so big and well known that they did not have to spend a lot of money for publicity. Because of this the show got no newspaper publicity in the cities it played, because of this, very few people knew the show was in a city. In city after city we asked clerks in hotels, policeman (sic), tax (sic) drivers and others where the circus lot was and no one knew the circus was in the city, and the show played to very poor business. In Dayton, Ohio, the newspaper gave a half front page to the James M. Cole, a little truck circus playing thirty miles from Dayton and no space in paper to Ringling show."

"Felix Adler of Clinton, Illinois, a very good clown with his pig. East Washington Avenue lot near U.S. 51 by pass, Madison, Wis. Aug. 13, 1947." Adler was actually born near Clinton, Iowa. Here we see Adler with one of his estimated 500 pigs. Since the piglets grew up so quickly, Adler would often stop by a farmhouse on the road to trade in his pig for a smaller one. Adler also appeared in *The Greatest Show on Earth* and by the end of his career "had also become one of the first great producing clowns in the country, directing the appearance of the entire troupe of Ringling clowns."⁶



"Inga Gunther on a spec float, Fair grounds lot, London, Ontario, Canada, July 9, 1953. This was a truly wonderful country to circus in. The people were very friendly and courteous." Braathen's passion for circus took him all over. Many of the floats had themes such as the Wizard of Oz, fairy tales, or Christmas.



"Burton (Alfred Schaefer) German hand balancing on blocks on a high platform, Elmira, New York, July 2, 1956."



Harold Alzana, Welsh, (Davis) Coming down a steep cable from the high wire. This is a good trick and uses no gimmicks of any kind. Elmira, New York, July 2, 1956."



"Tonito doing a forward somersault on the tight wire. Olean, New York, July 3, 1956. . . . A backward is much easier to do. In a forward somersault you lose track of the wire and have to find it instinctively."



"One of Nelson brothers on stilts in the spec, Dunkirk, New York, July 4, 1956." Despite sparse crowds and countless setbacks, the performers still took great pride in what they did. Even with the end in sight, these photos show that the performers and crew were determined to put on the best show possible, whatever Ringling's future may have looked like at the time.



"The band in the finale production number. Dunkirk, New York, July 4, 1956. What a band with bass fiddles, violas, violins, reeds, brass and drums. It played no circus music and did not cue the acts." While Braathen doesn't elaborate on what exactly was played, this was another radical departure in style for the show. North's new directors wanted to bring in a new audience by departing from the norm. While many of the empty seats can probably be attributed to late arrivals, no print advertisement, and a dwindling reputation, the new direction of the show probably didn't help. In just over a week, the big top would come down for the last time.



"Rock and roll production number on the hippodrome track, Dunkirk, New York, July 4, 1956." This number was a part of North's attempt to reinvent the show. With most of his bosses gone and, notably, Merle Evans, directors attempted to make the show more exotic to bring in new demographics.⁷

While John Ringling North was one of the best talent scouts the circus had ever seen, he began to lose control of the circus by the mid-1950s and stopped listening to advisors who may have been more in-touch with the public than he was.

While the show grew in talent and splendor, the finances were in shambles. Embezzlement and corruption were out of control. In St. Paul, Minnesota in 1954 the circus came to a standstill when John Ringling North ordered the current manager to fire his three main bosses. To retaliate, the bosses took as many department managers and crew with them as they could. This left Noyelles Burkhart to do the jobs of many men. The future of the show was uncertain at best.

In 1955 many long-time performers and crew members left the show, including Merle Evans, who had been bandmaster almost continuously since 1919. Attempts were made to revamp the production with such numbers as "Ringling Rock n' Roll." Due to chaos on the lot caused by new, inexperienced management and crew, the show often showed up late, missing much-needed revenue from matinee shows, often barely making it in time for the night show. In Geneva, New York a storm destroyed the big top, leaving only the option of performing in the open air until a new tent could be found.

As Braathen followed the Ringling Show through its last days as a big top operation, he captured some of the most unique images in circus history and they are both awe-inspiring and melancholy. These last images, shot in Pennsylvania and Ohio in 1956, show the circus in its full-color splendor. With no tent to restrict the light,

Braathen was finally able to shoot Kodachrome during the performance. These images offer an unprecedented, vibrant glimpse of what the performance would have looked like inside the big top. The perseverance and dedication of performers and crew show through, even as many images show the trains pulling into town hours late, forcing cancelled performances. Even though everyone knew the end of the big top era, and perhaps even the Ringling circus itself, was near, it was still the Greatest Show on Earth.

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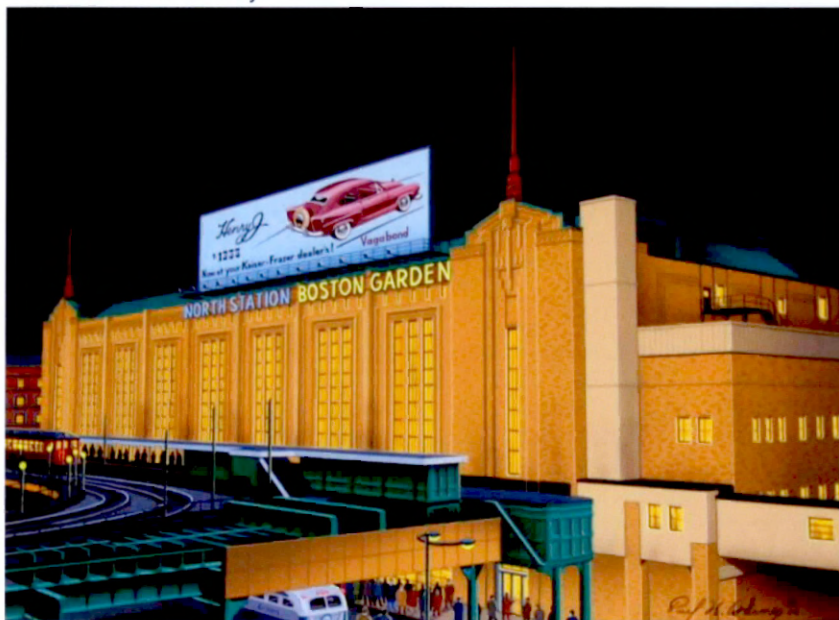
The Ringling Show I Knew

by Robert S. MacDougall

The first Ringling Show I remember clearly was the 1943 edition in Boston Garden. I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts which is approximately twenty five miles from Boston on The Boston & Maine Railroad. Boston was the big city as far as I was concerned, although Lowell had a population of over one hundred thousand after the turn of the century. I grew up on a street lined with company houses owned by a large textile company that my grandfather and father worked for. My father was the mill's shop superintendent and we lived on the second floor of one of the tenement houses. Directly behind our house were the railroad tracks and freight yards of the Boston & Maine Railroad. Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill were called the textile capitol of the world. Noted were the miles of three and four story brick buildings built along the banks of the Merrimack River that contained the cotton and woolen mills. The mills collected electric power from dynamos driven by water delivered from the river through a canal system.

Boston was my favorite city to visit. It was about an hour's drive by automobile and thirty five to forty minutes by train. Boston meant CIRCUS to me ever since I can remember. My family had taken me into Boston by train each year from the time I was born, I am told, to see the circus. Lowell was on the main line of the Boston & Maine Railroad. I can remember getting on the open vestibule passenger coaches at Lowell for the trip to Boston, arriving at Boston's North Station through one of four draw bridges crossing the Charles River and on to the arrival tracks with their covered platforms. Getting off the train, we had to walk past the huge steam locomotive that had brought our train from Lowell. My impression of seeing that steam engine was that it was huge. The steam escap-

The Boston Garden in the early 1950s. The Boston engagement came after the New York City opening from 1929 to the end of the canvas era in 1956. In 1943 Ringling-Barnum was there from 17 to 29 May.



ing from the piping around the engine sounded like it was panting after its long pull to Boston.

My recollection of the 1943 edition is as clear as if it was yesterday. The Ringling Show always played Boston right after New York City, usually in May. Boston Garden was located directly above the Boston & Maine Railroad's North Station, just across the river from Charles Town. Arriving by train one did not have to leave the station to enter the Garden, but we always stepped outside the station to purchase a bag of peanuts for the elephants from a street vendor, even though peanuts were sold inside, but at greatly inflated prices. Ramps lead right from the main station up to the third level and the ticket windows. The minute we got off the train and entered the station lobby, there was a sense of excitement; the circus was in town! Outside the ticket windows were the advance concession stands and program sellers hocking their wares.

Boston Garden was a slightly smaller version of Madison Square Garden in New York City. My aunt was a personal secretary for a large business firm in Lowell, and she always ordered circus tickets in advance, so that as soon as we arrived at Boston's North Station we would go directly up the ramps to the main entrance to the circus. I would be anxious to get inside to feed the elephants one of the peanuts from the bag we had just bought. We always had very good seats that were only a few rows from the performance arena. The smell of animals, fresh sawdust, popcorn and cotton candy filled the air.

The layout of the circus in the Garden had the menagerie and sideshow in another building, known as 150 Causeway, also on the third level. It was connected to the arena by a passage way leading from one building to the other. As we entered everyone was directed to the menagerie and sideshow before taking their seats. The menagerie was always included as part of the general admission, but in the Garden the sideshow was also free to ticket holders. The sideshow attractions sold post cards and other souvenirs of themselves, but there was no extra admission to see all the sideshow acts. When asked if I wanted to see the sideshow, I was reluctant because I did not like snakes or the strange-looking people who made up the continuously performing acts. In Boston, the sideshow platforms were toward the rear of the menagerie cages, along the far side of the building. I would rather spend the time looking at the animals. The crowd around the glass-enclosed gorilla cages was very deep and it was hard to get close to the cages to see the famous gorillas Gargantua and his mate Toto, who were kept in a separate cages set end to end. They were the most popular menagerie features.

I was anxious to get over to the elephant picket line to see if the elephants would be interested in my peanuts. I remember the crowd at the elephants was throwing so many peanuts at them, the elephants could not pick them up fast enough. There were peanuts all over the place. I kept watching for a special elephant that might be interested in one of



The Liberty Bandwagon was built in Ringling's Sarasota headquarters during the winter of 1942-1943. It was used in the Hold Your Horses spec. Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

my special peanuts.

I remember that the cages, elephants and lead stock were arranged in-between all the huge cement columns that supported the building. The area was relatively small and everything seemed to be crammed in. The show's horses were quartered in an area that was off limits to the public. After viewing all the sights of the menagerie and sideshow, we traveled back through the tunnel that joined the two buildings and were directed to our seats. The excitement of the sights, sounds and smells of the circus was almost too much to handle for one small boy!

The 1943 circus began with the opening spectacle titled "Hold Your Horses." I remember the arena was pre-set with billboards spaced around the hippodrome track with colorful circus posters on them. Next, performers dressed in old fashion costumes filled the hippodrome track, assembling to watch the big circus parade. There were couples with children carrying balloons and others arriving on bicycles. The announcement was made, "Hold Your Horses, Here come the elephants!" Horseback riders proceeded the big Liberty bandwagon carrying Merle Evans's band followed by a seemingly endless line of cages pulled by both horses and elephants, more horseback riders, and chariots pulled by four white horses. Clowns and pretty girls were interspersed between the cages. I remember a cage pulled by a dapple gray team of horses had the clown band on top. The only clown that I could remember was later known to me as Lou Jacobs. Finally, bringing up the rear was the Two Jesters steam calliope. The picture imprinted in my mind forever is the Clydesdale team pulling the steam calliope through the backdoor with steam belching out of the whistles and rising above the roof of the wagon.

The names of the acts were unimportant to me. The pure excitement was almost too much to handle. The big parade segued into the wild animal acts of Alfred Court in three rings of

steel arenas with so much action you could not decide which ring to watch first.

I remember a personal experience that occurred in my home town of Lowell involving Alfred Court's animals. We were at the height of World War II in 1943, and there were shortages of many things such as gas, oil and tires. Food was rationed and stamps and tokens were required to buy goods when they were available.

The shortage of provisions effected the circus in lots of ways. One was the curtailing of the big cage acts on the show. The cage acts were reduced to only the smaller animals and the large meat-eating cats were removed from the performance. I do not recall the specific date this incident happened, but I would guess it was after the two Garden dates in New York and Boston were completed.

I always kept an eye on trains. I lived between two switching yards of the Boston & Maine Railroad with the mainline tracks from Boston to Lowell running down the center of the two yards. The street that I lived on ran parallel to some of the yard tracks in one place. Riding my bicycle up and down this street, it was easy to get real close to trains. One afternoon I was riding my bicycle next to the yard tracks and noticed a couple of cars in the yard that were not freight cars. They were system baggage cars. This caught my attention, making me wonder what baggage cars were doing in the yard. Closer investigation revealed there was something in the baggage cars: cages containing wild animals! Standing in the doorways were men attending the animals. I was told to stay back because there were lions and tigers inside that belonged to the circus. The cars were only there a brief time and then were moved within the yard and onto a north bound train.

Many years later I put together the details of what I saw. The large mixed acts belonging to Alfred Court were being transported

The artist Bill Bailey created this poster for the show in 1943. The elephant wardrobe actually looked similar to the image on this bill. Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.





The grand finale of the 1943 show, Philadelphia, 31 May 1943. Bob Good Photo, Pfening Archives.

to Benson's Wild Animal Farm in Hudson, New Hampshire for the duration of the war. In a later visit to Benson's on a family outing, I saw the Court wild animal acts being presented at the farm several times a day. My memory tells me I saw more than one cage act presented in an outdoor big steel arena. The animals were being kept in cages behind the big steel arena. These cages were connected to the arena by a barred steel tunnel. What I saw passing through my home town were the animals traveling in system baggage cars being taken to Benson's.

Returning to the 1943 Ringling Show in Boston Garden, another act that left an impression on me was a beautiful white horse in spotlights on the hippodrome track. The horse did not have a rider and a man holding long reins dressed in a white costume was guiding the animal through its paces. I remember his hat had a very large white plume that matched the one on the horse's harness. Blue spotlights made the man and horse appear pure white, as if they were performing in the clouds.

There was a patriotic act using a long line of elephants wearing gold blankets and wings, a rider on the last elephant holding reins to all the other elephants in the line. A program check reveals this was the production number called "Let Freedom Ring."

I remember a slightly negative side to the show, the high wire act. I can't tell you why I did not care for that particular act. Maybe it was because of the danger involved and I was afraid that they would fall or the high suspense of whether they would reach the other end of the wire safely. I remember I could not watch them and covered my eyes. They worked high up from the arena floor and without a safety net. My aunt would tell me it would be all right because they knew what they were doing. This, of course, was the Great Wallendas.

The circus was loaded with color and excitement and seemed to

me like it would go on forever. One act after another, it just kept on coming. The big elephant number was another picture imprinted in my mind. I was much too young to realize that my Scotch heritage may have been the reason I was so impressed with the costumes and the music, and of course the thirty or forty elephants had a little to do with it too. The big finale of the elephant act was when all the elephants did a long mount on the hippodrome track, followed by a string of elephants dashing out the back door. It seemed like it would never end.

The big elephant act was not the end of the performance, although it certainly was the climax for me. It seemed it was the end of the circus but a check of the 1943 program shows several more acts including the flying acts and the final number entitled "Drums Of Victory." For some reason, I have no recollection of the final production number. My guess is that we did not stay for the finish of the performance. We may have had to catch the train back to Lowell which left before the conclusion of the performance. After the war was over, the railroad held all trains departing for surrounding towns and cities until the circus performance let out. For me it was a late night train ride home after an exciting day at the circus.

Every time we would drive into Boston on a weekend outing, we would pass by North Station just after driving over the bridge across the Charles River. I would always ask to drive slowly, so I could see where the circus had been. The family trips into Boston were always on Sunday afternoons when traffic and business were limited because it was a day of rest. As a family we all enjoyed the drive along the docks and seeing what large ships were tied up. We would cross over a swing bridge and drive out on what was called

The cover of the 1943 program was a tribute to banner men created by Roland Butler, the multi-talented head of publicity. Pfening Archives.



Commonwealth Pier, or better known as the Fish Pier. It was a very large pier that extended out into the bay where the fishing boats of the North Atlantic Fleet tied up. The fishing boats would be three to five boats, side by side and end to end all the way around the pier when the whole fleet was in. There were Sundays we would drive out on the pier and there would not be one fishing boat in port. These boats were called trawlers and were very colorful. Each company's boats were painted alike in the company colors. Another picture imprinted in my mind was the fishing fleet in the winter time when they just arrived in port, covered in ice. The view from the end of the fish pier allowed a panoramic view of Logan International Airport. I loved to watch the planes taking off and landing. The drive home always included a stop at Revere Beach where we would stop for hot dogs and an orange soda. My mother always had to have a box of freshly fried potato chips and a big dill pickle wrapped in a paper napkin taken right out of the huge wooden pickle barrel. These were great family outings.

As the years went by there were many more trips into Boston to attend the circus. I could not wait for May to come because it meant circus time to me. We always took the train into Boston to see the circus because the automobile parking near the Garden was scarce and expensive. It was much easier to take the train. As I got older, a trip around back to view the circus back yard was a must.

Boston, like any other major city, was and is a very congested place. In the 1950s the building of the interstate highway system through Boston kept the circus back yard directly behind the 150 Causeway building, a construction zone from about 1953 through 1956. I left the area in 1955 as the bridge and road system was nearing completion. Both the Boston Garden and the 150 Causeway building were torn down in the late 1990s as part of the demolition and building project known as "The Big Dig." The Garden was built in 1926 directly over the train station, replacing a Boston & Lowell Railroad station. However, in the late and early 1950s, the back yard action could not be equaled by any back yard activities when the show was under canvas. There was a very long wood and steel ramp that reached from ground level to the third level of the 150 Causeway building for vehicle access. The ground space around it was very limited and was mostly taken up by the Railway Express operation connected with the depot. There were several tracks at ground level that served Railway Express and a freight warehouse. This limited the space for circus equipment, floats, trucks, tractors and wagons necessary to the daily operation.

Depending on the year, it was a great place to visit, but it was also very dangerous. Most of the floats used in the production numbers were kept outside. It was interesting to watch tractors bringing the floats down the steep ramp where the working men would proceed to cover them. At times you could find a menagerie cage or two stored outside, due to lack of interior space. The working cage act animals were kept outside as well. Photography was difficult at best, however. It was an interesting and different place to catch the circus back yard action.

The circus train unloaded in Chelsea, a South Boston suburb, at the Boston & Maine tracks. This sight was adjacent to the famous Cherry Hill Prison. The equipment was marshaled here and taken to the Garden for unloading. Animals were walked to the Garden when things were set up and ready for them at the building. When work on the interstate began, the circus back yard virtually became a battle field, full of construction equipment. I recall stock cars being kept right at the bottom of the ramp in 1955 when the show carried 50 plus elephants. Two stock cars were used to house the extra elephants who would not fit in the building.

In later years I would take the train to Boston on the last day of the engagement, which was usually a Sunday. The back yard was a beehive of activity as equipment was loaded and made ready to go



Mack truck pulling wagon to lot, 1948, location unknown. Pfening Archives.

to the train. The action was something to see. Any equipment that could be loaded prior to the end of the performance was quickly removed and taken to the train. As soon as the menagerie and side-show closed, the cages were removed from the building, closed and covered, then taken directly to the train for loading. With daylight savings time in effect, some of the train loading took place in daylight. Because of train schedules between Lowell and Boston, I would have to tear myself away from the action to catch the train back home.

I started photographing the circus in 1948. That is the year I think the circus bug bit me when the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows brought their huge circus to my home town, Lowell Massachusetts, for the last time under canvas. My father used to tell stories of all the circuses and Wild West shows that used to play Lowell when he was a young man. A check of the route books tells me he was right. Barnum & Bailey and the Ringling Bros, one or the other, played Lowell every year from the late 1890s well into the 1920s and 1930s. My father told a story about Buffalo Bill coming to town and how all the town kids swarmed around his private car just to get a look at him in person. My father was born in 1903. I think the show he saw was the 1916 Buffalo Bill and Miller Bros 101 Ranch Real Wild West. The story did not have a pleasant ending. After what seemed hours waiting, the great



Two Caterpillar tractors unload the train, 1948, location unknown. Pfening Archives.

man finally appeared on the vestibule of his railroad car, waved to all the kids and went back into his private car. My dad never revealed if he went to the show and saw Buffalo Bill perform. I checked the route books. The show in fact played Lowell on June 19, 1916. If he ever saw the original Buffalo Bill-Pawnee Bill how it would have been in 1911 when he was only nine years old.

He told a similar story about waiting to see the famous movie cowboy Tom Mix when he toured with the Sells-Floto Circus. Both of these men were featured performers with shows that played one day stands Lowell. One quick story my grandmother used to tell. One year when the circus came to town, she said a long string of horses pulling the big pole wagon had to come up into her front yard in order to turn the corner. My grandmother's house was between the railroad yard and the fairgrounds lot. Her house was on a corner that was bordered by a hill leading to a bridge over the railroad tracks and on the opposite corner was a fence protecting a drop off of about six or eight feet. These circumstances made that corner particularly hard for the long teams of horses pulling wagons to make the turn. Grandmother said that when the big pole wagon and its team came to her corner, the lead horses had come up on the cinder sidewalk to the edge of her front yard and stopped. They could not make the corner without coming into her yard. The boss rode up on horseback, looked the situation over, gave the driver the go ahead, and the team came up into the yard and finished making the turn. Later she said a circus man came to her, the legal adjuster we presume, and offered to pay any damage that the horses may have caused. She told the man that it was ok and she did not feel like there was any damage done to her front yard. He thanked her very much and went on about his business.

All of these stories were told over and over again, but mostly when another circus was coming to town. My grandmother's house had a great elevated front porch, the perfect place to sit and watch all the circus action happening out on the street. There were stories of cowboys herding cattle and buffalo in the street, and elephants

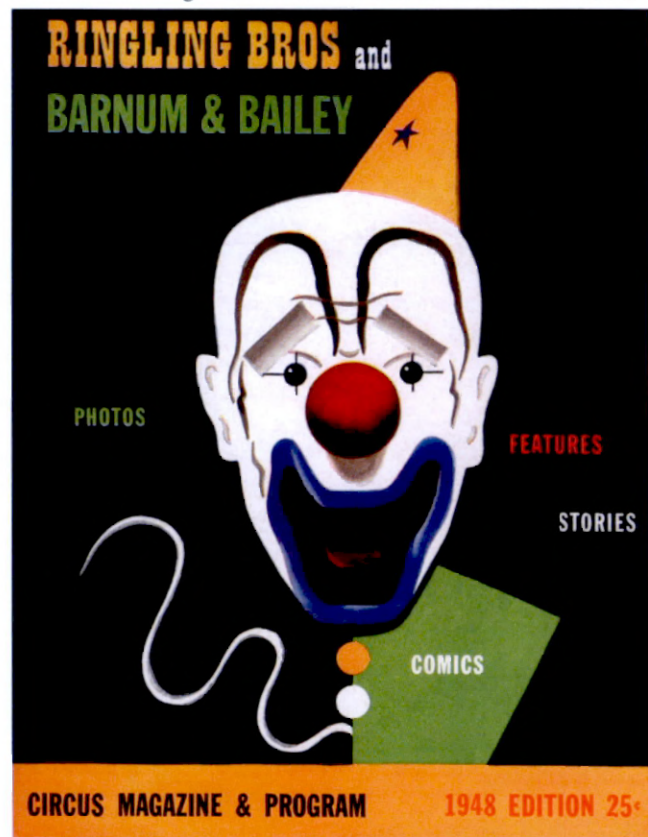
passing right in front of her house. She told me that the last elephant carried a lantern to protect the rear on the way back to the stock cars at night. My grandmother made sure I saw every circus that came to town up until she passed away.

By 1948, I had just become a teen ager. I had seen other circuses and can recall being taken to see Russell Bros Circus with my grandmother. But this was the Big Show coming to town, not just any old circus but the Big Show itself. The day before the circus was scheduled to come, I rode my bicycle out to the lot to make sure everything was ready. The field had been freshly mowed and there was a man in a suit walking around the grounds. He looked out of place because he was wearing a suit. When he came closer, he asked how I was. He then asked if I could help him for a few minutes. I said, sure! Many years later I realized I had been asked to help the famous 24 hour man Willie Carr to lay out the lot! I was up at the crack of dawn the next day but had not slept, thinking that every train whistle I heard was the circus train arriving. I finally got up and dressed, headed for the railroad yards where I knew the first section of the circus train would arrive. It was early dawn and in the faint light of morning, there it was, setting down in a yard just off the main line of the Boston & Maine Railroad. The runs were set and the cookhouse wagons were being unloaded. The show was being moved by chain-driven Mack trucks. Macks have a special sound all their own. The smell of diesel fuel was strong and between the Caterpillar tractors and the chain-driven Mack trucks, moving the show equipment was a sight and sound that I will never forget.

The trucks were hooked up to strings of wagons that headed for the lot. As you exited the railroad yard, one turned right and out into a main street at the bottom of a long hill. This was not just any hill. It was very steep and was quite long. The Mack trucks took that hill with a string of wagons like it was a leisurely Sunday drive. I was amazed at the pulling power these trucks had. The circus lot was about four miles from the train. The old circus lot was on the fairgrounds, just at the top of the hill just described. The old lot was less than a mile from the train; however, the new show grounds

were farther out of town by a few miles. It was somewhat remote, and was called Manning's Field. It was very large and the show was able to spread out. The cookhouse was set up at one extreme end of the lot and the midway and main entrance was at the other end of the field. The sideshow was set up on the edge of a low marsh-like area of the lot that was not real solid ground. The menagerie and big top were set up on higher ground, which was more firm. The Caterpillar tractors did not have problems moving equipment where it needed.

I'm getting ahead of my story. Back at the railroad yard, the second section had arrived on the high line. The unloading tracks were down on ground about twenty feet or so lower. The second section was being picked up by a switch engine which started down a loop track leading to the unloading tracks. The empty first section flats were exchanged for the loaded flats of the second section. I



E. McKnight Kauffer, an important graphic artist, designed the 1948 program cover. Pfening Archives.

watched part of this section unload and felt that I was missing a lot of action at the circus lot by trying to keep up with the trucks hauling equipment to the lot. When I finally arrived at the lot, it was a sea of activity. I was so excited. I didn't know where to begin looking first. I give the cookhouse a quick once over, smelled bacon and coffee cooking, and realized I had not stopped for breakfast. Who needs to eat when there is so much to see?

I remember the menagerie cages had been pulled on the lot past the cookhouse and were left in strings as they were unhooked from the trucks. Most of the cages were covered in canvas, but a few were not. Animal men started to take the covers off and clean out the cages. What struck me was the colors! Some were red and gold and the gorilla cages looked like they were white, even though they left the canvas covers on the two gorilla cages. Other cages were painted in pastel colors, pink, mauve, green and yellow. I was lucky

to have black and white film as color film was beyond my financial limits. In fact, the one roll of film I had in my old box camera had to last the whole day. Although I was out of the picture taking business fast, my brain recorded those sights, colors and smells well enough that they are still in my memory.

The stake drivers were active, working their way around where the big top would stand. The midway was starting to take shape. The ticket wagons and sideshow front wagons were pulled into place. I thought to myself that the sideshow tent was going to be in the marshy area of the lot. Once the tent was set up, it was apparent that the layout man had done his job well. The tent was several yards from the soft ground I had been worried about. There was activity all over the lot, all happening at one time. I was very impressed with how large the circus really was.

Having seen the show in Boston Garden, I never realized there was so much more. I just could not get over how big this thing was. It was three times the size of any circus I had seen to this time. On family outings we would occasionally run across Hunt Bros Circus playing near Lowell, but it never played Lowell itself. I remember seeing the Hunt show on a Sunday and the smaller tents were set up. The big top poles were up and the canvas was spread and laced to the poles, but the tent was still on the ground. There did not seem to be any work going on and everyone was kind of relaxing. My dad pointed out that there was a card game going on between the working men who had gathered in a sort of circle. It was the perfect picture of a show at rest.

Once Ringling-Barnum's big tents started to go up, one got a sense of being lost in a whirlwind of activity. Because the tent obstructed the sight line, making it difficult to see what was going on all over the lot, it became necessary to hike from one location to another to catch the action. The animals had arrived and I realized I had missed seeing them come on to the lot. The menagerie was up and the Caterpillar tractors were pulling the cages into the menagerie. Workmen were starting to put up the side wall.

Many years later I realized I had missed some important elements of the show. For instance, I do not remember the new seat wagons making an impression. I could not have possibly missed eighteen thirty-five foot long seat wagons, but I must have. Likewise, I don't remember the new low-profile wild animal act cages. I might have missed them because they were in the back yard which was off limits beyond a rope mesh fence.

The floats had been left in the same area as the cages, and when I was getting ready to leave the lot, I saw workmen unloading spec equipment from a flat bed wagon. I stopped and took a picture of this. It was time to ride home and get some lunch, which I was ready for, having missed breakfast. When I returned home, I could look down the street and see something silver. Wow, the circus railroad cars were stored on those tracks. They were rarely used but the sheer size of the show and the number of cars that had to be stored during the day must have taxed the railroad facilities to its limits. There was limited track at the unloading sight so most of the cars had to be stored on other tracks. I road my bicycle down to the silver cars and took the last picture on my roll of film. At home the question was being discussed, which show we were going to go to. My baby brother was only five or six years old and it was decided that mother would take my brother and me to the afternoon performance.

I have to stop and analyze why I do not have any outstanding memories of the performance. I was much more impressed with the physical aspects of the circus than the performance. I think having already seen the show in Boston Garden a little over a month earlier, I doubt we went to either performance. I just can not recall

any details about the performance. I know I was awestruck by the physical size of the show. I could not get over how much stuff was carried by the circus. Everything remains vivid in my mind about the train and the equipment, but I do not recall much about the performance I saw in the Garden.

As soon as my father got off work I started hounding him about going back to the circus grounds to see more. After supper we headed back to the circus lot in my dad's 1935 Buick. As we drove up the road parallel to the circus lot, we were approaching from the cookhouse end. I was surprised to see that the cookhouse was almost gone. Tractors were hooked to some of the remaining wagons and others had already left the lot. At the other end of the lot the crowd was gathering for the night performance and the midway was crowded with people, lining up at the ticket wagons and taking in the free entertainment of the sideshow bally. I just wanted to see as much as I could before the day was over. My dad let me take him anywhere on the lot I wanted to go. We had left my mother and brother at home. It wasn't long until the night show started and the working men started taking down the sideshow tent. Most of the ticket wagons were closed and were being made ready for the trip back to the train. We continued to watch the menagerie cages being taken from the menagerie tent as it was being torn down by a swarm of men. Pretty soon there was nothing left but the big top and whatever was needed to support the rest of the performance. I ask if we could go down to the train and watch the loading.

As we approached the railroad yard, there was a huge crowd already there. We found a place to park the Buick and walked over to the yard. People were all over the place. I guess back in those days the people were not restricted from going on railroad property. The cookhouse and cages were already loaded and they must have been waiting for the railroad to pull the loaded flats out and put empties in their place. We walked along side the flats on which the cages were loaded. As we approached the flat car with the gorilla cages, we saw a small light bulb shining from under one of the wagons. There was a man with his bed roll sitting under the cage along with two Doberman pincers tied to the wagon. This is the one thing that stands out in my mind about seeing the train loaded. I guess we stayed for more of the loading but I remember no other incidents. I do not recall seeing where the animal cars loaded, but I do remember the stock cars being kept way at the other end of the loading tracks. We did not stay to see any of the sections depart but I wish we could have.

The following year Lowell received a visit by the brand new Biller Bros Circus. It was a truck show and played the same Manning's Field as the Ringling Show had used the year before. The amount of space this show took up was about one third of what was required by Ringling. There were four very tall pine trees that divided the field, Biller Bros was contained in the larger section of the field. Ringling, of course, took up almost the entire field.

The 1948 menagerie was the last of the old fashioned menageries. Although it was similar to the menageries of the 1920s and 1930s, the wagons were the same except all the beautiful sunburst, wooden wheels had been replaced by hard rubber and pneumatic tires. I guess the thing that stands out is the variety of colors the cages were painted. This would be the last year most of

these cages were used.

Most of them were replaced in 1949 by cages made from ex-military ordinance carriers. Twelve of these ammo wagons were purchased by the show. They were taken to the Sarasota winter quarters where Bill Yeske and his crew removed the military bodies and built new cage bodies on all twelve wagons. These new wagons were only eleven feet long. At first they looked rather strange because they were so short. They became the major part of the new menagerie and the jungle motif that was applied to all of the menagerie units. The giraffe dens, hippo den and rhino cage were all holdovers from 1948; all had the jungle motif. The two gorilla cages remained white, but had the jungle theme added to their sides and ends. One more of the 1948 cages was rebuilt into a glass enclosed cage but was not air-conditioned. The glass panels opened outward, allowing fresh air into the cage. This wagon was painted white like the gorilla cages. It carried chimpanzees and the orangutan, and also had the jungle theme. The menagerie tent was the same size as it had been in previous years, but the interior was given the jungle look by painting all the poles to represent palm trees. At the top of each quarter pole were large palm fronds made from plastic.

The concession stands in the menagerie were decorated in the same jungle theme. At the corners of each stand was a prop palm tree. The only menagerie cage that did not carry the jungle look was the new polar bear den, which was one of the short ammo wagons. It was decorated to look like the frozen Arctic. Canvas side wall surrounded the giraffe dens which were directly behind the polar bear den. These side walls were painted to look like the frozen North as well. The 1949 menagerie was a drastic change from the conventional ones of past years. The last major themed menagerie was in 1941. It was designed by Norman Bel Geddes to give the complete midway, sideshow and menagerie a modern and streamlined look.

I continued to see the new edition of the Ringling Show in Boston Garden each year and started taking more photographs in the back yard. I did not see the show under canvas again until 1953 when I took the train to Manchester, New Hampshire for a one day stand on June 17th.

Cages fabricated from Army surplus ammunition wagons. Note palm leaves at top of quarter poles. Washington, D. C., 17 May 1949. Edward Ruppert Photo, Pfening Archives.



An Interview With John Herriott Second Session

By Dale Riker

Riker: This is the seventeenth day of December 1997 and we're with John Herriott again to continue the saga of the Herriott Family. John, I think that on the last one we got you going to Mills Brothers, so if you want to start there, we can do it there.

Herriott: Fine, well at that time Mills Brothers wintered in Jefferson, Ohio at the fair grounds and I brought up the camel act I worked on Gil Gray having made a deal with Jake Mills to come up. We moved from Dallas, Texas, the Gil Gray winter quarters, up to Jefferson, Ohio.

I immediately went to work training and routining the animals and the horse act for the coming season. In 1951, Mills Brothers had bought some ten or twelve nice Kentucky thoroughbred type horses. And Paul Nelson had trained them for a liberty act. They had worked there for a number of years and over the years they had lost a horse here, a horse there and the previous season they had worked an eight horse liberty act.

They had brought Carlos Carreon, a wonderful horse trainer, he was a Mexican, Carlos, but he had been on Downie Brothers Circus back in the late thirties and Jake Mills had played in the band there

The Mills brothers, great Ohio showmen, l. to r. Jack, Jake, and Harry, 1951. Jack always looked this rumpled. Tom Parkinson photo, Pfening Archives.



and his wife, Ida, had done menage and web and so on, so Jake knew Carlos. So Carlos had been there before and then he went back to work for Glen Randall out in California. He spent a lot of time with Glen who was a Roy Rogers horse trainer of note.

The fall before I came, they had put the horses out on the picket line, out on the grass and the lead horse named Leopard had somehow got twisted up and either broke his leg or something so there were only seven horses and no lead horse. So I immediately started to practice and put a six horse act together, which took some routining to do.

They had another liberty act of six black horses. They were quite old and they had lost one of those horses and I took a little buckskin horse that had been part of a liberty act they had previously had and made a little six horse act with five blacks and one buckskin. Sounds a little unorthodox, but it looked good.

I put together two four pony drills and amazingly in 1942 my dad had sold off the dogs and ponies and animals to Mills Brothers. They still had one pony from that time named Jolly Jack, and I put him in the lead of a four pony drill. He must have been almost thirty years old.

Anyway I had the two four pony acts and the liberty horse act and the camel, llama and pony act that I brought from the Gil Grey show.

In Jefferson, they had in part of the big building, that was the main winter quarters building, they had a squared off corner of the building with a ring in there so that was where we did the practicing. Out of those sorrel horses there was a horse named Duke. He was an end horse like in the six horse or the eight horse. Anyway when Count Beketow had been on Mills Brothers he trained this horse to do an excellent high school routine.

Count Beketow was married to Mrs. Gauthier, Axel Gauthier's mother, I think Edith was her name. They had been on Ringling. Mr. Gauthier was a wonderful horse trainer and his wife and their daughter, Mrs. Ingeborg Rodini (?), When Axel's father died in 1948 on the Ringling show, they had gone back to Europe and she had married Count Beketow from the Beketow Circus family in Hungary. Then Mills Brothers brought him and her over to Mills Brothers Circus and Axel was a young boy there.

Hugo Schmidt had been the elephant trainer on Mills Brothers and Axel and his family were very close to the Schmidt family. So when Hugo went to Ringling, he took Axel with him. That's the history of how Axel became the elephant trainer on the Ringling Circus. But it all happened on Mills Brothers.

To get back to the training, it was traditional with Mills Brothers to have a menage number with all the girls riding menage, which is old, old time circus. And they were the last circus to really have a menage horse routine as such. They also had jumping horses and specialty horses and dancing horses down the hippodrome track, which was right down my alley because I had worked with my father and done that on little circuses before. There was quite extensive winter quarters work and training to be done at that time.

22nd ANNUAL TOUR



Mills Brothers Circus letterhead from 1961, the first year the Herriotts were with the show. Pfening Archives.

Then the Charles Zerbini Family was there, and as I previously pointed out they brought three lions over from France. They had two big females and one big male. Then Jake bought a young male and female lion from the Columbus Zoo and they had a steel arena set up and they would practice putting a five lion act together for the coming season. That was Charles Zerbini and his son, John, who later became Tarzan. Their daughter, Mimi did a single trapeze act and their mother Suzanne and Mimi also were contracted to ride menage. So when I had the teaching sessions for the girls to ride menage, they were part of that as well.

So we worked and got ready and the Mills Brothers Circus was ready to go on the road that season [1961].

Every year they opened in Jefferson, Ohio, usually in the rain and the cold, always miserable. And Jack Mills always bought a brand new, white handkerchief big top from United States Tent & Awning. Rather than put up the old tent, he'd put up the new tent on opening day and it looked so beautiful. But when they'd take it down, they wouldn't, like the European Circuses put straw or something on the ground, they'd drop it right in the mud. So the first day out of winter quarters the tent was already muddy and full of footprints. But that was the way Jack Mills did it.

Jack and Jake and Harry were three brothers. Jack was the oldest brother and he was the principal owner of the circus. His brother Jake was the second partner of the circus. He didn't own quite as much as Jack, I understand. Harry didn't own any part of the circus, but he was the concession manager. But they functioned as the Mills Brothers Circus. Jack's name was actually Morris Milinsky, but they had changed their name a number of years ago to Mills.

Riker: They came off the Cole Show?

Herriott: Well how Jack started out is interesting because they were a real Jewish, Yiddish family from Cleveland, Ohio, a lot more brothers and sisters than just those. But their father, I think he was some sort of a business man, a little business or something in Cleveland. So Jack was not a guy who wanted to work for a living, you know do manual labor so to speak. So Jack figured out to be kind of a con artist and I suppose showman. Jack went out and got to be a candy butcher. I think he butchered around the Cleveland ball park, he probably sold beer or hot dogs or something. Then he went out and became a candy butcher on circuses.

From the candy butchering business, he became a banner man, he sold advertising banners. He had been with the Lewis Bros. Circus, which was a medium sized motorized tent show owned by Paul M. Lewis.

Paul Lewis was probably the first guy to start telephone solicitations on one day stands on a tent show. Jack being a front-end

banner man and all, he got his feet wet and learned about the phone promotion. They would sell the banners on the phone. They would phone the town rather than use free kid tickets or under privileged children's tickets. In those days they would sell those banners.

Jack continued that all through the years of Mills Brothers Circus, even on the one day stands. Sometimes we would have two hundred banners. We would have so many banners they couldn't hang them up in the tent and they would have to have the performers parade with them on a clothesline like a spec.

Program cover from 1961 listing John Herriott, with name misspelled, as announcer. He also rode a high school horse; worked a camel, llama, and pony drill; and a liberty horse act in the performance. Pfening Archives.



1961 Season

22nd ANNUAL TOUR



PRODUCED BY MR. JAKE MILLS

EQUESTRIAN DIRECTOR, JOHN SCHMITZ

CHOREOGRAPHY BY ZELDA LAMONT

MUSICAL DIRECTOR, JOE STEFANS

WARDROBE BY STROUD'S OF LONDON

ANNOUNCER, JOHNNY HERRIOT



I was the announcer. Before the show started, I remember Jack Mills would call me up to the marquee. Now he was a very emphatic man and deliberate in how he said anything and he would say to me: "This is what you say: 'We want to call your attention to the advertising banners hanging throughout the circus big top. These represent some of the leading professional and business people in your community who have so graciously cooperated with our sponsor in making the Mills Brothers Circus a big success here today. We ask that you examine them very closely. If you should see or need anything in their line, please feel free to call upon them as you will find them wonderful business men and professional people who it has been a pleasure to do business with.'" And that's the way we made the banner pitch.

Anyway, Jack was the front-end man. Jake followed in the footsteps of Jack and went into the business as a musician, a trumpet player. He had married Ida Mills. Incidentally, Rose Mills, Jack's wife, and Ida were sisters. The two brothers married sisters. Jack had been married previously. I think he told me he was married to a Canadian girl when he was with the Cole Brothers Circus selling banners up in Canada. That marriage didn't work and when he came home he met Rose. Jake was already married to Ida before Jack married Rose.

Anyway, Jake took his wife Ida and he went on the Downie Brothers Circus, probably in the early thirties. He played in the band and his wife did menage and swings and ladders. Jake, quite the enterprising businessman, told me that he could cut hair. He was barber and that when he was on Downie Brothers he got fifteen dollars a week to play in the band and Ida got fifteen dollars a week as a menage girl. Jake said he carried a barber's chair. He had a car and trailer, and first thing unloaded out of the door was his barber chair. In the morning he would load it up and go to the next town.

Harry had followed in brother Jack's foot steps as a candy butcher. He remained that all of his life and he was a hot shot high stepper. They were all enterprising, hard working people. Harry had

Among the performers on Mills Bros. in 1961 and 1962 was the Zerbini family, headed by Charles Zerbini, shown here in 1962. Don Smith photo, Pfening Archives.



become the so called Boss Butcher on the Cole Brothers Circus when they took it out with Clyde Beatty. He had the number one menagerie novelty stand and he did very well. So they had the backgrounds in the circus and show business and were well suited for each of their jobs with their own circus.

They had bought the R. J. Richards Circus that was defunct in 1940, I believe, and they framed the Mills Brothers Circus. I think the first season they made a few hundred dollars. From then on they never looked back. It was a successful operation up until its final years.

They were all characters, the three of them. Jack Mills was a very well met fellow



Jack Mills had been a banner salesman on various circuses before starting his own show. So it wasn't surprising that the Mills Brothers Circus big top was usually filled with advertising banners from local merchants. This Mills image is from around 1966. Pfening Archives.

with not much of an education but he could be emphatic in how he would meet and greet people. He knew that the circus fans of America could be very helpful to him in acquiring a sponsor or maybe knowing some town that the show could play so he really cultivated the circus fans.

They had a cookhouse on Mills Brothers Circus that was always pretty good. It served good solid food and was the old style circus cook house where the star performers and the staff people had waiters come to their table. The other working men had to go through the line to get their food, but it was a good house and Jack Mills always knew that any circus fans that were on the lot naturally would like to eat in the circus cookhouse so he would always meet and greet them and say: "You gotta go to the cookhouse. Set at my table, tell them I sent you." He would be very put out if you didn't go. That was a big deal for him to welcome everybody into his cookhouse. Incidentally, he never ate there himself, nor did Jake and hardly ever did Harry. But Jack would have his coffee in there in the morning.

And that is an interesting story as how he settled with his committees. He was quite an outgoing personality. When he had the Mills Brothers Circus he had a sponsor contract that was pretty severe in that the sponsor had to come up with a thousand dollars on circus day when they made a settlement. There was a guarantee of a thousand dollars in the contract that the sponsor had to give to Mills Brothers Circus. That was over and above the amount of tickets that were sold or banners or phone promotions and so on. I use to love to sit in the cookhouse and watch.

Jack Mills would come in and do the settlement with the committee. In order to get that thousand dollars, he was a smart fellow. He knew that if that circus wasn't up, if the big top wasn't up and



Jon Zerbin, Charles's son, was a Mills headliner with his exciting exotic cat act, shown here in 1963 on Mills. Don Smith photo, Pfening Archives.

those seats weren't in the tent that the sponsor could renege on coming up with this thousand dollars because they could say to him; "We're not going to give you the thousand bucks. Your circus is not prepared to show." So about ten o'clock in the morning it was very important that tent be up and those seats be in and it was ready to go.

Then he would set in the cookhouse. He had an English lady at that time. She and her husband did a juggling act. She was his so-called secretary. I think he liked the idea of introducing his secretary. So then he would set at the cookhouse table with the sponsor committee, whether it be the Lions Club or the Kiwanis Club or whoever it would be, Jack would say to them: "Now boys, We are going to make the settlement here, and the first thing I want to point out is that all of you are educated people and business and professional men, and unfortunately I only went to the third grade so you are going to have to help me in doing this settlement. I have my secretary with me and she will take notes, but please, as a third grade educated person I have to do it in probably a crude way and the way I do it is, we climb a ladder. We are going to climb a ladder here this morning and we are going start at the very bottom rung of the ladder and each rung of the ladder will be an important part of our settlement. Now rung number one; 'How many tickets have you sold?' So the sponsor would say; 'Well, we sold so many tickets.' Very seldom the sponsor, themselves, ever sold any tickets, very seldom. 'Well, how many tickets were sold on the telephone solicitation?' Then he would get into this top rung of the ladder, 'You owe me a thousand dollars.'"

But during the settlement one of the sponsors would say: "Well, you know Mr. Mills that phone promoter you sent in here, now, you know he got drunk and didn't pay his motel bill and left town with some of the money that he had collected." And Jack would say: "Whoops--whoops, that's not on this rung of the ladder. We're

going to get to that later." But the top rung was that he got the thousand dollars. So then if they came up with a check, Jack would say to them: "Well, this check for a thousand dollars is made out to Mills Brothers Circus, now you, you, you and you," pointing to the various members of the committee, "all know that the nice man downtown that is the president of your bank that this check is written on. Unfortunately, that nice man down there who is the president of that bank doesn't know who I am. So why don't you, you, you and you get in my Cadillac and we'll go down and you introduce me to that nice man who is president of the bank and we'll cash this check." That was the way Jack Mills did it.

Now when he would come back from cashing this check, he would call me, at various times up to the marquee, and he would introduce me to a man, a bank president or a lawyer and Jack would say: "Shake him by the hand." That was his expression when ever he would introduce me. "Shake this guy by the hand, this is the president of the bank downtown and boy is he the smartest man I ever met in my life. And when you make the announcement for the circus, you make sure you tell them that the club and blah, blah blah." He enjoyed all of that.

Then he would set in the marquee. Jack Mills never had a house trailer, he always drove overland and he always stayed in motels. He would get up early in the morning. When we would be driving on the route with our car and trailer about seventy miles an hour, Jack would whiz by us in his Cadillac heading for the lot. To make sure that tent was up and that he could do his settlement with the committee.

But after he did the settlement with the committee, usually he

would go with his wife to lunch. Then he would be back there and set in that marquee all day long. They had the Yiddish newspaper sent to him from Cleveland and he would set in the marquee and read the Yiddish newspaper. He always kept a lot of notes and papers and envelopes and letters in all of his pockets in his suit and top-coat. He never shaved every day, so he usually needed a shave and had an old slouch hat on his head. But he would yell and welcome every circus fan to the lot and shake by the hand. And if any of his foreign performers happened to walk by, he would say: "Here come over shake this guy by the hand, tell him where you come from," meaning they

came from Germany or Czechoslovakia. That was his way of operating and doing business.

As the Equestrian Director, it was my duty to see that the show was ready to go and the spec was lined up. We had what we called Jack Mills time, we always showed at two and eight o'clock. But Jack Mills time meant that the spec started at five to two and at five to eight. I would stand by the band stand and when Jack Mills would wave his finger from the marquee, or the entrance, that meant blow the whistle, the band plays and here comes the spec. Even if the people weren't completely in the tent seated, he would hold them in the marquee until the spec went around and then allow them to go into their seats. He would set there all day long, through both performances.

Jack Mills had a clown on the circus that was an old personal



The Mills midway on a good day about the time the Herriotts were with the show. Pfening Archives.

friend, a Jewish clown named Herman Joseph. Herman's job was to kind of a gofer for Jack Mills, except he was an old man and he couldn't gofer too much. But he did keep cigars for Jack.

The circus was very efficiently run. Immediately after the tent would come down during the wild west concert, Herman would bring Jack a lawn chair and set it out by the light plant. And Jack would set there through rain, weather hot or cold. Didn't make any difference, he would set there until the last center pole was put to the ground and then he would get up, get in his car and go to the motel. And that's the way he operated. He never left the lot until that last center pole hit the ground.

Now his brother Jake was the actual manager of the circus and Jake's job was to move the circus and put the performances together. He kept the trucks in shape. He did everything a general manager should do. He was quite a character. He was a musician and he always had a wonderful eight or nine piece band with a good band leader and he did the arrangements for the music for the show himself.

But during the day his first job was to see that the equipment got from town to town. Now Mills Brothers never, ever bought a brand new truck. Never. They bought trucks from some freight line or company, old tractors that had been traded in. They would bring four or five of those into winter quarters every year, paint 'em up and fix 'em up. They were to pull the semis from city to city. I think that we had like seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty semis on that show. It was a pretty good size circus. But they always bought Chevrolets, always exactly the same engine, so everything was interchangeable in parts on the trucks.

Jake was quite an unusual guy. Every winter in Cleveland he went to a trade school, so he knew exactly what he was talking about. One winter he went to a trade school on how to be a mechanic, so he knew all about those engines. One winter he went to a trade school to learn diesel generators, so whoever was hired Jake knew he had a working knowledge on how to fix them and what they needed and so on.

So Jake would follow the fleet over the road and they had what they called four or five mechanics. Well, that was stretching the point a little. But one or two of them were capable of fixing the trucks. The truck would be broke down with the motor blown or something. They had a little tow truck and they would tow it on to the lot.

Jake had his way of doing it. The first thing they did, now you're on a dirty or dusty lot, the first thing you would do is unbolt the hood of the truck and lay it down and turn it upside. Jake would have these guys tip the hood up because they had to take all the bolts and the parts from this motor and lay them in the hood so they didn't get lost in the dirt. Then they would put a new motor in. They hauled the extra motors in their shop truck and Jake loved



Jack Mills loved having old troupers around his show. One of the better known was the old-time clown Herman Joseph who also functioned as something of a personal assistant to Jack Mills. Pfening Archives.

that. He had a little bald head and he would spend all day out there and have grease all over his little bald head in pointing and showing these mechanics how to put these motors in. He did that frequently.

Then Jake would love to come in for the evening performance. We never saw him on the matinee. On the evening performance, he would like to come in and sometimes he would bring his trumpet with him and sit up with the band. He loved to play with the band.

If not, he would bring a lawn chair, and I had a lawn chair and I would announce and he would set while the acts were on. He would talk to me but he would watch the show.

Harry, he was operating the concessions and he did a good job. He had a typical circus type operation. They didn't pay a big percentage, so they didn't have what you would call real circus high-powered candy butchers around. Harry would break in the candy butchers himself. He would give them a tray of popcorn or what ever. But he would go right in the seats with them and teach them how to do it. He was a very aggressive guy as a candy butcher and with the novelties or souvenirs. He would do what we call "duke 'em." He would take a souvenir and put it in kids hand and hold his hand out to the father to give him the money. He was pretty gutsy. But anyway he did his job and they were very successful.

There are a lot of funny Jack Mills stories that the fans in those days would tell as would people on the show.

All the performers had to double in brass. They either worked on the seat wagons or the light plant, and they got paid a little money extra. But that way they knew they had capable people looking



Herriott with his six horse liberty act on Mills in 1962. Don Smith photo, Pfening Archives.

after these things. And every male performer had to drive a truck over the road so they had capable drivers. They knew exactly what they were doing.

I remember one time we had a man with a chimpanzee, a German man, Walter Wright was his name; he also worked on the light plant. This Walter Wright had been on the circus in previous years. The poor man he got cancer and it was obvious that he was getting weaker and weaker and losing weight. Pretty soon he is in this display when the chimpanzee pulled him over one day in the ring. We all felt very sorry. Well, Jack Mills naturally heard about it, he wouldn't watch the show, but he had some stool pigeons who told him everything that went on. So he called me up after that matinee.

I believe and he said to me: "Now you go and tell that man that I want him to take that chimpanzee and put it in the cage wherever it lived. I don't want to see that chimpanzee on this circus grounds from now on until the end of the season. But you tell him I'm going to pay him whatever I am paying him and to continue doing what he is doing, except I don't want to see that chimpanzee anymore."

That was the way Jack Mills did business.

So we stayed with the Mills Brothers Circus. I added a nice

pony that walked on his hind legs to the camel act during the season.

Every year they went to Europe where they hired acts for the show. Struppi Hanneford, Tommy Hanneford's wife, had been brought over by Jack Mills with a partner. It was called the Luvas Duo, a wonderful aerial act. So many other performers who have been active through the years came on Mills. The Dubsky family were with Mills Brothers Circus. I could name a bunch of them, including the Zerbini family.

So I had this pony walking on his hind



Virgil Sagraves, known as K. Y., was in charge of the Mills elephants for years, including the early 1960s when this photo was taken. Don Smith photo, Pfening Archives.

legs and one night Jack and Jake Mills were setting with me watching the circus. And Jake said to me, "Why don't you train some of them horses of mine to walk on their hind legs?" They reared, but none of them actually walked on their hind legs. I said to him, "Oh, Jake those horses are old. They are all at least twenty years old." And he said to me, "Well, I go to Europe every year and I see Schumann and Knie and all the great circuses with equestrian acts." I said, "Yeah, but boy they've got nice, young Arab horses and so on." He said, "Naw, I'll tell you, I go over there every winter. I'll bring you back some moving pictures of them and you can see 'em." At that time that International Showtime thing came out on television with Don Ameche and they showed a lot of European circuses. And I said to Jake, "Naw, Jake I see them on that International Showtime TV show." And he

said to me, "Well, I'll take you to Europe with me this winter and by golly, you can see them horses and you can train them to do what they do. They are not supermen."

So I announced the concert, the after show, and I went to the trailer and said to my wife, "Guess what, Jake said he would take me to Europe with him this winter to see all the big horse acts." And my wife said to me, "Over my dead body." She knew that Jake liked to run around. So she said, "You're not going to go and run around in Europe with Jake Mills."

So now that next night Jake comes in and he says, "Did you tell your wife that I was going to take you to Europe with me?" I said, "My wife said over her dead body. She said she knows that you like to chase the girls." He chuckled and laughed. He thought that was pretty cute, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, Rose and Ida want to go to Europe this winter too." They would go infrequently. He said, "They want to go this year to Europe as well. I'll take you and your wife with me."

Wow, now I go into the trailer after the concert and I'm changing out of my wardrobe and I say to my wife, "Guess what? Jake said he would take us both to Europe." "WOW"

Now we finish on with the season and Jake said to me, "You know you got to get shots to go to Europe?" In those days you had to get whatever kind of medical shots.

So we finished the season. Now, Jake had an agent in Cleveland and they put on Christmas shows together. I had a performing poodle dog that did a nice little single obedience type routine. I was the master of ceremonies and the Zerbini's had two baby chimpanzees they had trained, plus they did their rope spinning and whip cracking act as the Tom Ricardo Family. We went out and we played Christmas shows all around Cleveland. So we would leave in the morning in the station wagon and drive to various places, maybe Mentor, Ohio or all around the Cleveland-Akron area.

So we're in Cleveland doing a Christmas show, and now it is getting around the 15th of December or so. And Jake said to me, "Now did you and your wife, you got to get your shots if you're going to Europe." And I said, "Wait a minute Jake, Come on, my wife and I would both love to go to Europe, but you're going to buy us a plane

John and Mary Ruth Herriott spent 1963 to 1969 at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The Moeller Hippodrome, shown here while under construction, was built about the time of their arrival. Circus World Museum photo.



ticket to Europe, but we can't afford to go Europe with hotels, and restaurants and everything."

He said, "Look, I said I'm going to take you to Europe. I'm going to pay everything. I'll pay the hotel, I'll pay the restaurant. The only thing, you like to drink and I'm not going to buy your alcohol."

I said, "Wait a minute, Jake, you know I'm not happy with the kind of money you're paying me next year, I am going to have to have more money and I don't want you to come and hold me up and say, 'Well I took you to Europe.' I am trying to raise a young family and I need money more at this time, more than I need that you take me to Europe."

He said, "No, No that won't interfere with our business."

I said, "OK."

So he did and we did go to Europe and we spent about twenty days there. We flew to Kennedy airport. We flew to London and



Mary Ruth Herriott Roman rides the Wilbur Deppe elephants under John's direction in the Moeller Hippodrome about 1964. Pfening Archives.

Jack and Rose and Jake and Ida and me and Mary Ruth and we had a wonderful trip and some classic Jack Mills things happened while we were there.

For an example, we got in London and Jack stayed at the Savoy Hotel in London and we stayed, I believe it was the Cumberland, which was a nice leading hotel but not the Savoy, naturally. Well, Jake and Ida and Mary Ruth and I stayed at the Cumberland. They had an Austrian-Jewish agent named Robert Coralack, who was pretty much the guy who scouted out the acts for them. He and his wife met us there.

We had a clown on the show, Eddie the clown, and he went back to England and then clowned on the show in the summer time. So Jack called him and Eddie was like our tour guide while we were in London.

So Jack decided that he wanted a Rolls Royce car, he had heard about the Rolls Royce cars. Now he didn't know the first thing about an engine or anything, but he knew they had a chrome plated radiator with an RR in the front of it and that was supposed to be THE car. So one day Jack and me and Eddie the clown get in a cab and we go downtown in London to the main Rolls Royce dealer. This was where Antony Armstrong Jones and all the Royal Fam-

ily and everybody bought their Rolls Royce cars. We go into this beautiful dealership and the Rolls Royces are sitting on carpet on the floor and out comes a very pompous courtly Englishman in a cutaway. He comes in with a snobby look on his face and Jack is in his same old felt hat and his old topcoat that he wore on Mills Brothers Circus and he needed a shave. Eddie the clown looked a little scroungy. His topcoat, you could see the black stain around the collar, the greasy stain. I was well dressed, because we had a credit card from Sears & Roebuck and before we went to Europe, I got some nice sports coats and slacks. So I looked pretty good. We walked into this dealership and the portly Englishman walked up to us and Jack pulled out a five cent William Penn cigar and stuck it the guys upper pocket of his cutaway and he said: "My name is Jack Mills of Mills Brothers Circus, USA and I want to buy a Rolls Royce.

"It's got to have seventeen coats of paint on it." He had heard that they put seventeen coats of paint on their cars. "It's got to have seventeen coats of paint on it, It's gotta have a hydromatic transmission, it's gotta be air-conditioned and it's gotta be delivered at Jefferson, Ohio no later April the 21st." That was the opening day and Jack wanted it setting on the lot on opening day.

That came out of his mouth in one sentence. The English man, he really looked down on us. Well, we walked through the sales room and where they special ordered Rolls Royces and so on. He tried to sell Jack a Bentley. I think that is the el-cheapo Rolls Royce, but it didn't have that RR on the radiator so Jack wouldn't have any part of that. So then we left there when the guy said he didn't think he could promise delivery by April the 21st.

Then Mary Ruth and I did some wonderful sight seeing. We went to Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, the London Bridge, just wonderful.

Then Jake Mills told us that the Billy Smart Circus was doing a Christmas Circus up in Leeds in Northern England and he wanted to go up to see that. Well Jack was not interested. He was going to stay in London. So Jake and Ida, Mary Ruth and I took the Coralex Rose, one of those quaint English trains, from London up to Leeds. What a beautiful trip, like in the old movies where they have the door you open on the side of the train. It was just beautiful.

So anyway, we went through the coal mining region at night and you could see all the smoke stacks in the day time and it was quite a unique trip.

We got up there and we saw the Billy Smart Circus. It was a beautiful circus. They had a big spec with spec clothes and Billy Smart, Jr. worked fifteen elephants. It was a sensational circus.

I recall that the Smart family was quite wealthy and we got to meet young Billy Smart, Jr. And Ronnie Smart, his brother and family. The elder Billy Smart was dead. And they had these elegant semi-trailer living quarters that were just beautiful.

When were leaving that night, Jake Mills put in my sport coat pocket and the inside pocket and outside pocket as many English pounds he could shove in there and he had in his own pocket English pounds. What happened was that the Smart family wanted to come to Miami Beach each winter, but in England they were only allowed to legitimately bring out, say, five hundred dollars. So Jake had a lot of money, and they exchanged pounds for dollars so Jake

could bring as many pounds as he wanted. But that was a little side light.

Now we went to Amsterdam. We stayed in the Amstel Hotel, a beautiful hotel. Now Jake hires a limousine and driver to take us on a tour through Holland. We are going to do some sight seeing. We get in this big limo Jack and Rose and Jake and Ida and Mary Ruth and I and we go out to the Zider Zee and went to the city called Haarlem where we had lunch. Then we went and saw where the dikes controlled the ocean. We went to the flower gardens, where the flowers, tulips, were grown. We then saw the pill boxes that were still in the fields. They were put in with such deep concrete that they couldn't even blow them up. It was all very interesting but while the tour guide, a portly Dutch gentleman, is pointing this out, Jack was looking at the apartments and he would say, "Now hey buddy, a guy that works for a living, how much is the rent over there in that apartment house?" He was more interested in the economy of Holland than he was in sight seeing. Ida was outspoken and she said; "For God's sake Jack, Shut Up, they will think that you're a real estate agent."

Well we made our tip from Holland, then we went to Hamburg.

Riker: Did you see a circus in Holland?

Herriott: We saw a beautiful circus. The Strassburger family was the predominant Dutch circus people. Jake pointed out to me that they were German-Jewish and they had got out of Germany when it was difficult and established a circus in Holland. They had a Christmas circus at some big, big building there and they brought in what they called the Circo Americano from Spain as a partner with them. A guy named Castille owned Circo Americano and I guess that he made so much money in Spain with his circus in order to get dollars he brought the show from Spain and leased it out to other impresarios. He had a lot of beautiful spec wardrobe and floats and equipment. The circus was the Strassburger liberty horses I believe

Herriott developed the loading and unloading show at Circus World Museum in 1963. This photo shows the popular demonstration in August of 1964. Eldon Bailey photo, Pfening Archives.



Herriott was deeply involved with Chappie Fox in staging the great Milwaukee parades sponsored by the Schlitz Brewing Company. This photo of the France bandwagon is from the first parade in 1963. Fred Pfening photo, Pfening Archives.

their elephants and the wild animal act. That's where we saw Pablo Noel who was with Ringling for a couple of years. The Spanish lion trainer. That was a wonderful circus.

Then we went on to Hamburg and we saw the Haus Vaterland, the Hansa Theater and all the wonderful nightclub shows there.

Then we went on to Paris where we went to the Lido Club, and saw the great variety show there. Went to Cirque d'hiver and Cirque Medrano. Oh, that was an exciting time. We went into Cirque Medrano on a cold evening in a quaint little building. We went in the lobby and there was a woman in braids, an old gypsy woman setting in a little booth selling tickets and that was Mrs, what is that circus family from France, it will come to me in a minute. They owned Cirque Medrano and they actually owned Cirque d'hiver. They owned both circus buildings. So we went in there and we went in the seats, we were there a half hour before the show started.

They put us in nice box seats right in front of the ring and it was chilly and we were setting there with our cloth coats and our coats on and all of a sudden a little puff of smoke comes through a grate. They had fired up the furnace down in the basement to heat it up for the show. It got warmer and warmer and the show went on. You could see the performers in the back curtain peeking out because they knew American circus impresarios were in the audience.

We're setting at Circus Medrano and half way through the performance, it finally warmed up in there and Jack Mills is there he is setting snoring right in front of whole parade. Rose woke him up. But anyway we attended all the circuses in France.

In London we went to the Olympia. The Schumann horses were performing there. We saw Albert and Max Schumann and that beautiful white, twelve horse liberty act. We saw the twelve Strassburger horses. I saw Bill Smart Circus which had twelve Fresian horses. Magnificent.

Then in Paris, one morning while we had coffee, I said to Jake: "Listen, Jake, when we get back to winter quarters, I am going to take all those horses and put a big twelve horse liberty act together and I'm going to break some of them to walk on their hind legs."

And Jake said: "See Johnny that's exactly why I brought you over here."

So he was right, he was right. He knew I was a young fellow with ambition and who knew if he opened up the world to me that I was going to move in there and do my job and that is exactly what happened.

We got in Paris, another Jack Mills story. Jack wanted to eat some Kosher food. We were eating in hotel dining rooms, so he inquired around and he found what was supposed to be the best Kosher restaurant in Paris. We went there and we were setting around the table, Koraleck and his wife were Jewish and only Mary Ruth and I were not. I had never attended a big Kosher dinner before. So I said to Jake, "There is no butter here for my bread."

Jake said: "Shut up, you're lucky you don't have to eat with your hat on."

We had a wonderful trip, a wonderful tour. Jack Mills was a crude man. Like he said he only went to third grade, but we were on the plane and we were flying back from Europe to New York and

Chappie Fox and the wagons he collected for Circus World Museum on the Milwaukee lakefront in 1964. Pfening Archives.

he told his wife go over and set with Mary Ruth. He called me over and said: "Come on set with me." So I sat down and I am a young fellow and Jack Mills said to me: "You know when we get back to winter quarters, there is going to be a lot of jealous people there. A lot of people that won't like you."

"What do you mean?"

He said: "We took you to Europe, and they are going to be upset." But he said: "I just want you to know that, but don't worry about it because it is our money and we spend it the way we want to."

But what a good judge of human nature he was. When we got back to winter quarters you can be sure it was frosty around there for a while.

So I said to myself, "This guy, we think he is kind a dumb but he is a pretty smart fellow."

Well we spent the season there and my wife . . .

Riker: This would have been what 1960,

Herriott: 1961, maybe 1961 or 1962, I did go back, I did put the twelve horse liberty act together and it was quite a big success for its time. It went well and also we did the Detroit Shrine Circus and Cincinnati. Jake had booked the animals acts. He loved that. He wanted exposure for Mills Brothers. So we did work some Shrine winter dates too.

But when I opened in April, I had the twelve horse liberty act,



and it was big success. And I trained some additional menage horses so I had nine girl riders and nine horses in the menage number in the show.

Riker: Do you remember any of the acts that were on the show?

Herriott: We had the Maricio Drouette and his wife.

Riker: That was an English . . .

Herriott: We had Drobbie Mooch, the Pedrolas, Dagmar and Gary Pedro. They were a wonderful act. The Wilhelm Schmidt family was there. They did a good head to head act, and he acted as the ringmaster, Johanne, because he could interpret for all those other acts that didn't speak hardly any English.

We brought from East Germany the Great Fronstein. He caught a knife on a block of wood on his head, from a teeterboard. A very, very wonderful and unique act. And the Ruel Family from East Germany did a marvelous a four people perch act, similar to old Gretonas and Roccas and some of those great perch acts of years ago. The Zerbini family naturally was there, and it was a top flight show. The Dutchman Paulo DeCanter and his wife did a wonderful hand balancing act and acrobatics. Joe Stephan was the band leader and K. Y. worked the elephants with his wife Rita. A lot of the English girls that had come over in previous years had married into various segments of the show. Mannick, June Mills and Fats



The Circus World Museum wagons were shipped by rail to and from Milwaukee for the parade starting in 1965. This picture shows the unloading back in Baraboo after the return from the great march. Pfening Archives.

Brazen's wife Bluie and Rita Segraves and others who were English girls who had come over with Johnny Pugh's father, the Digger Pugh girls. But they weren't bringing girls over. We did have some single girls, but most of the girls in the show were wives who worked in production.

We went through the season. My wife was pregnant. Our daughter, Laura had been born when we were with the Gil Gray Show and while we were still with Gil Gray we had another daughter. When she was thirteen months old she died of pulmonary pneumonia. We lost that little girl.

Our daughter was born when I went out to train horses for the Hunt Circus. After I left Gil Gray, our daughter Cindy was born in Trenton, New Jersey while we were in the Hunt Brothers winter quarters.

Then on Mills Brothers, the first year we were there, we were in Westerly, Rhode Island and my wife was pregnant. Mary Ruth never had a chance to perform too much with Mills Brothers. Mary

Ruth was very pregnant when we got to western Rhode Island, and it was on a Saturday night and a wonderful circus fan from Westchester, Massachusetts, Joe Carberry and his wife were good friends of ours and they were visiting. And a lady circus fan there was a nurse and while I was announcing the concert after the main show and they came in and said to me, "Boy, your wife is really having labor pains, she has got to get to the hospital."

So Jack Mills took over and announced the rest of the concert. And I took Mary Ruth to the hospital and my daughter Heidi was born on a Sunday off in Westerly, Rhode Island. Mills Brothers never showed on Sunday. I went and picked Mary Ruth up on Wednesday and we continued on with the show.

Then the following year in the fall my wife was pregnant. In the meantime my father had pretty much retired from the circus business. When I was on the Gil Gray show, he spent about three years as the trainer of the Shrine White Horse Mounted Patrol in Sioux City, Iowa. The Aba Bacca Shrine Patrol. And I believe that was one of the first and certainly the most significant Shrine Horse Patrol. They had a trainer there before my father. He was kind of a self-taught circus type trainer a Mr. Wallen and he had passed away. He had trained a number of horses. They did a whole trick horse trained act show, this Shrine Patrol. My Dad came after Mr. Wallen died and he spent three years training there and then he went to Minnesota. In the meantime while I was on Mills Brothers, Dad became ill as he had a stroke and was pretty much incapacitated. He passed away toward the end of this season.

We flew to my father's funeral and spent a couple of days in Minnesota as I recall. Mary Ruth, being pregnant, stayed there.

I flew back and I finished the last couple weeks of the season. Then I went into winter quarters. They always paid everybody a bonus. You got paid so much. Like the performers, if they worked on the seat wagons or the light plant or drove a truck, they got \$10 a week extra. Then they got \$10 a week bonus so they got like \$20, \$10 as part of their pay and they had to hang around winter quarters until everything was polished, put up and put away. The generators were drained of fuel and the trucks were washed down and so on. Everybody had to wait around for their bonus. Well, I wasn't part of the bonus, but I used to go in on the muddy nights and frequently I would drive the seat wagon tractor and pull the seat wagons out of the big top. So the first year they gave me a \$1200 bonus for doing that. That was pretty nice. Then the next year I also did that so I was entitled to a little bit of a bonus as well. Then I had, as I say, I didn't get paid much money with Mills Brothers. When I came back from Europe I did negotiate a \$25 a week raise. And that was just like pulling teeth out of Jake Mills's head to get that twenty five bucks. But it still wasn't enough.

During that second season, I got the *Amusement Business* magazine and there was an ad in there, a very little ad, and it said: "Wanted to hire elephant and pony trainer, C. P. Fox, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin."

I immediately went right to the telephone at the gas station by the lot and I called up C.P. Fox and I told him I was interested in that job. He said that I should get in touch with him in the fall. He and Wilbur Deppe had been to the circus when we played around Chicago. Deppe owned the elephants at the Circus World Museum and was instrumental in the circus performance put on there. So they had seen me. Then I answered that ad. When I left Mills Brothers I went to Minnesota and I stayed there and my wife had our baby Weiner, our daughter Christine, we call her Weiner, was born.

I was in limbo then. I was staying with my mother at her house with my wife and our family. I was looking around, and Mills Brothers wanted me to come back, but I was determined I wasn't

going to go back and work for that kind of money. I felt that I deserved to get more. So then I contacted Chappie. So I think that sometime in November or December, we drove to Baraboo and we had a meeting with Mr. Deppe and Chappie and there was a fellow named Dean Adams, who owned the Simon House Restaurant in Madison, Wisconsin, right downtown. The governor and all the legislators would eat lunch there. It was a high class restaurant-supper club. He was a circus nut and he loved liberty horses. It was his dream to see a twelve horse liberty act at the Circus World Museum. He had gotten with Mr. Deppe and they formed a partnership, called the A & D Circus Company. They would provide the one ring circus for the Circus World Museum. I believe they got a quarter for every ticket that came through the front. That paid the expenses for the circus operation.

Wilbur Deppe was the most predominant businessman in Baraboo. He owned ready-mix concrete; he owned the Deppe Lumber Co.; he was the Conoco Oil distributor; he was involved in the industrial expansion and so on and so on. His father had been in the lumber business before him. He was an enterprising businessman and Chappie Fox knew that the key to success in Baraboo was to get on the right side of Wilbur Deppe.

When they first opened the Museum about three years previously, it was only on the front side of Water Street. It wasn't across the little Baraboo River. Then they acquired the land on the other side and they needed a bridge. So Chappie went to Mr. Deppe and he personally engineered and constructed that walk-across bridge that was there for so many years. Then he built the Moeller Hippodrome Building that we performed in. And he got interested in the circus.

There was a fellow from Appleton, Wisconsin, Bill Griffith, whose family was in the printing business and he was a circus nut. He took out circus called Adams and Sells and he bought a young baby elephant and he brought over Jenda Smaha. He trained that elephant, her name was Bertha, and he did a magnificent job. She was probably the most sensational, single elephant act in America. Jenda could even sit up in the seats and Bertha would go through her routine in the ring.

When Adam and Sells went broke, Mr. Deppe bought her and brought her to Baraboo and they hired Jenda Smaha and he worked Bertha in this one ring circus. Then she was highly acclaimed and Al Dobritch was the big agent and he got her booked on the Ed Sullivan show.

The people from the Nugget Casino out in Sparks, Nevada, they made an overture that they wanted to buy her and Mr. Deppe, being the businessman he was, quoted a figure that he thought was high. But they paid \$16,000 for her, which now would be a paltry sum.

In those days an elephant was worth about \$3000. Jenda went with her and remained out there and he has been a success in Nevada with elephants.

But Mr. Deppe bought three baby elephants, and he brought Tony Smaha and his wife in there, but they were high school horse trainers and performers. They did the show the following year. They had two of the baby elephants that had just been bought and then the third one. Tony started training a little six pony drill. They had spent the season there and it became obvious to Mr. Deppe that they were more interested in booking their high school horses, which was a top-drawer act, out on winter dates, and didn't spend their time in training. He wanted a full time trainer.

So that is why they hired me. I came there after a meeting with them and they hired me and my wife. So I had a year round job.

Well, that was great. My God I was thrilled. Mr. Deppe had built a beautiful block building, ring barn and stable. It couldn't be any nicer for a young fellow topped by three beautiful baby elephants. They also had acquired twelve ponies.

So I trained the twelve ponies and I trained the three elephants for their act. Then I trained a little dog and pony act. Then Mr. Deppe went out and bought a beautiful American saddle bred horse and I trained him for high school.

We opened there and we spent a very successful seven years at the Museum.

Riker: That would be from what 1964 [1963].

Herriott: It would be up to 1971 [1969].

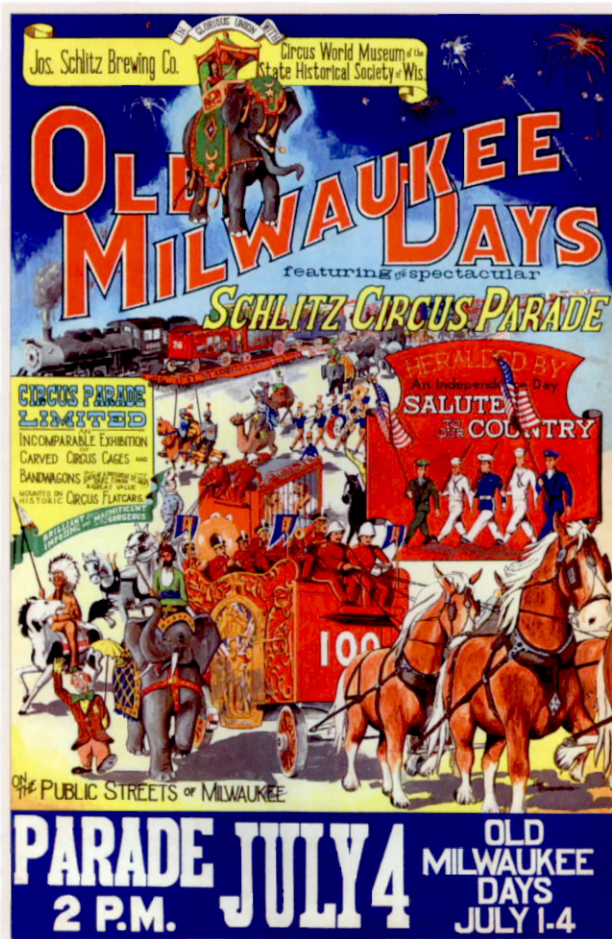
The first year we were there I was able to meet, have dinner and get acquainted with John M. Kelly. He was then ninety years old. He was the man who really came up with the idea of the Circus World Museum. He had been the personal attorney and counsel to the Ringling brothers. I believe his wife's sister was married to Alf T. Ringling. It was a very wonderful time.

My father had always told me a lot about the old circus and its history, and now I am at the Circus Museum in Baraboo. I am really

learning about the history of the circus. That also was a wonderful experience. I met Fred Gollmar, one of the original Gollmar Brothers. He was ninety four years old. I got well acquainted with Judge Robert Gollmar, his son.

Chappie Fox, Wilbur Deppe and Dean Adams were fine people to work with. I did get the twelve pony act trained and Dean Adams would come down once a week and watch me train. He was very, very supportive and enthusiastic. Unfortunately at the end of that season, he had a heart attack and passed away. It was quite a loss, because he was a fine fellow.

We operated under this company called the A & D Circus Co. Adams and Deppe. After Mr. Adams died, Mr. Deppe bought the



Window card from the 1966 Milwaukee Parade. Pfening Archives.



Closing day at Circus World Museum in 1966. Pictured l. to r. are ringmaster Paul Luckey, museum director C. P. Fox, cat driver David "Deacon" Blanchfield, clown Dick "Rocco" Lewis, wardrobe mistress Mayme Ward, visitors Edna Curtis Christiansen and her husband the great horse trainer Jorgen Christiansen, performers John Herriott, Mary Ruth Herriott, Julie Drougett and Mauricio Drougett. Pfening Archives.

twelve ponies. Mr. Adams had owned the ponies. Mr. Deppe owned the elephants. Mr. Deppe bought out the interest of Mr. Adams. Then Mr. Deppe owned the circus.

The first year I was there Chappie came to me all excited. He had been trying and trying to get a sponsor for a grand free street parade on the streets of Milwaukee. He went to Ben Barkin, who had the public relations account with the Schlitz Brewing Co. They had a meeting with Bob Uihlein, the president of Schlitz and owner. That was the history of the Milwaukee Circus Parade.

For two years they trucked it down. They put the wagons on flat bed trailers, mostly Mr. Deppe's equipment. They would bring it down and unload it on the streets of Milwaukee and the horse teams would assemble there and hook it up. Then they put on the parade, I believe for two years.

I was always supportive of Chappie's ideas and he was always interested in my ideas. We had a good relationship and we worked well together.

Chappie came to me in the fall of the second year and said: "Johnny, I can get the World of Mirth flats, the old World of Mirth carny flats. What do you think about it? We could take that damn parade on the circus train."

I said; "Wow, I think that would be fabulous."

He said: "What do you think, how would we do it? These are priceless antique circus wagons." So we talked about putting them on the flats with chain binders and all kinds of equipment to hold them and maybe only load two wagons on one flat for fear of anything happening. The more we talked and the more we talked, it seemed obvious to us that the way circuses did it with the chock blocks seemed like the best way to do it. So, by golly, he went and he got some money from Schlitz or whoever and bought the World of Mirth flats. He brought them in and he got the car shops at that time, either donated or they bought them. They refurbished the flats.

The first year I was there, I had started a little train loading show. We had two flat cars on the Museum property. Chappie went out and bought four Percheron horses. I trained the horses and we did the little show loading and unloading circus wagons. It was quite a nice animated display of circus history.

So that became a very key element, because we got all those flats. Now we got to train the train crew and load those wagons. I think we had sixteen flats the first year.

Chappie hired Gene Traxler, who was the local blacktop operator, and he had a crew of about seven or eight men. Traxler was a good friend of ours and a good friend of the Museum and a pretty good engineer type guy. Chappie made a deal with him and his crew that they would be the train crew to load and unload the wagons. I was the teacher and for a week

or ten days before we actually loaded the train to go to Milwaukee, we had training and practice sessions down on these two flat cars at the Museum. I had trained the horses to pull the wagons with the snatch block and pullover teams and unloading and so on.

So we got the train crew trained and went to Milwaukee so that was the beginning of the Circus Train going to Milwaukee.

Chappie came to me and said that there was a wonderful man who had retired from Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus named David "Deacon" Blanchfield. He had been the superintendent of transportation for some fifty years with Ringling Brothers Circus. Chappie would like to bring him up on a little stipend to hang around during the summer time and maybe we could pick his brain from his circus career. He would be kind a colorful character. He was a diminutive, little man who wore a suit all the time because he was a typical little old time circus guy. Very gruff little fellow and we all fell in love with him. He was a great guy. He was eighty-seven years old. He was a great cat skinner. He could get up and drive a cat and spot those wagons at the runs. I was always the trainmaster and I used him, I picked his brain. "Hey Deacon, how about this, how about that?" He was very helpful. He later had to go to Hartford, Connecticut and passed away. But he was quite a guy and it was a wonderful experience during those years to have him around.

We had a wonderful seven years in Baraboo. We built there; our children went to school. Everything was going well, but I was in my thirties and my wife was in her early thirties and we started to think: "Wow, are we going to spend the rest of our lives here?" We both loved the circus business and the traveling. So it got to be more of: "I don't know if I want to devote my entire life to living in Baraboo, Wisconsin."

We did take the animals out on the Shrine Circus tour and we were very successful. We worked the twelve pony act which was a big hit and my wife's dog and pony act grew in stature, and our three elephant act was top drawer. So every year we pretty much had our pick of the good winter Shrine indoor dates and winter circuses. We did the CBS Coliseum show out of New York, network program. So we were successful.

But it was just the idea, maybe we were getting tightened in there in this pattern of living. We longingly looked at Florida. It seemed like everybody that we worked the winter dates with was

in Sarasota while we were up in Baraboo at forty below zero. And I loved Baraboo, I didn't mind. I am a Minnesota boy and I loved the changing of the seasons.

BUT. Mr. Irvin Feld had entered this conglomerate with Judge Roy Hofheinz and they had bought the Ringling Circus from John Ringling North and his people. They had operated it for one year then Mr. Feld announced that he was going to take out two units of the Greatest Show on Earth. I had never been with Ringling and my father had never been with Ringling and naturally every circus person dreams of some day being with Ringling. I don't care who they are. That's like the old vaudevillian. Their dream was to play the Palace in New York, and believe me, any circus person's dream is to be in Madison Square Garden with the Greatest Show on Earth.

So I wrote a letter to Mr. Irvin Feld and sent my resume, stating that I could train and work twelve liberty horses, camels and elephants and my wife was accomplished with liberty horses and so on and so on. And we sent this letter to Mr. Feld.

And it just so happened that Chappie came to me a few days later and he said to me; "Johnny, Irvin Feld is going to be here, visiting the Museum this summer."

"Wow!" I said.

Now Chappie had always tried to cultivate John Ringling North when he owned the circus. And for some reason John Ringling North wasn't remotely interested in the Circus World Museum or coming back to Baraboo at all.

Henry Ringling North stopped in maybe once or twice, but there was not much of an affection or communication with the Norths. So when Chappie got a call that Irvin Feld was personally going to come there he was ecstatic.

Chappie had told me that when Irvin and his people bought the circus that he and Tom Parkinson and maybe Fred Pfening [unfortunately, Pfening was not involved], anyway some of the noted circus historians at that time, had written a letter to Mr. Feld and his associates and pointed out to them in this letter that they not only owned Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. They pointed out the various things that were part and parcel, the number of titles that they owned, and probably music and various things.

So Irvin was interested. He wanted to know what the hell he owned. That was his main reason, I think, for coming to Baraboo. Plus he had my letter. Chappie came to me and said Mr. Feld said he had your letter. I had not discussed with Chappie that I was happy with him, but I was looking for other opportunities. He understood. He would have been tickled to death to see me go with the Greatest Show on Earth.

Anyway here come Mr. Feld and Allen Bloom. We were just about to do the train loading in the morning when he arrived at the grounds. I shook hands with him. My God, what a thing to shake hands with the man who operates the Greatest Show on Earth. My hands were perspiring. Here was a colorful businessman with a fancy silk suit on.

And I said: "Wow. This is the big time."

And he said to me: "Do everything, you and your wife do everything you do. I want to see everything you do."

He stayed. We did the horses, the ponies, the elephants. I had a mixed llama-camel act He saw it all.

Naturally, the so-called circus historians that could be there were there. That was a big day at the Circus World Museum.

Then that morning, in my office, a Cole Brothers ticket wagon Chappie had given me, Mr. Feld came up to this office.

Mr. Feld said to me: "I understand that if you leave here all these animals here are for sale. If you put a fair price on those acts, I'll buy them. And whatever acts are your own I'll book them and I will

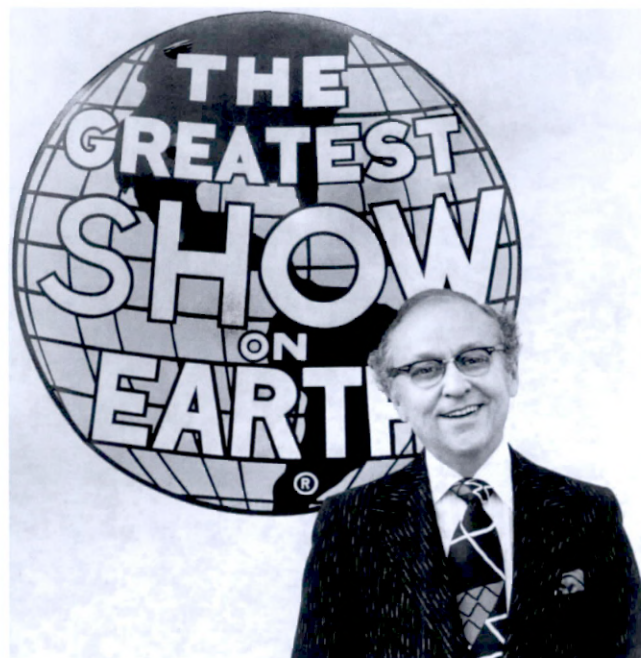
bring you and your wife on the Greatest Show on Earth."

He laid it right out. He said: "Bob Dover is the performance director on the Red Unit and I'd like to have you be his assistant. Gunther Gebel Williams is there and I'd like to incorporate your animal acts and I'd love have you and Gunther create some great animal acts for the Greatest Show on Earth."

My reaction was "Wow." I said to myself; "This is unbelievable." I was just overjoyed. So we did, we made an arrangement. They bought the animals and we left Barrabo and went to the Greatest Show on Earth.

No one told Gunther Gebel Williams that Mr. Feld wanted me and him to train acts together. I don't think that he was too happy that they hired another trainer.

Also Mr. Trolle Rhodin was quite an impresario with John Ringling North in the last ten years or so. He was Swedish and a great



Irvin Feld about the time he hired the Herriotts for the Greatest Show on Earth. Ringling-Barnum publicity photo, Pfening Archives.

Swedish Circus owner and a European impresario. He had been the man who had gone behind the Iron Curtain and got the Polish and the Bulgarians and the great teeterboard acts and brought them to Ringling. He had been very, very instrumental in the operation of the circus during the late, late North years. And when Feld bought the show, Feld had incorporated Mr. Rhodin and he still remained as a talent scout. He did not have quite the authority he had under the Norths, but he was still a confidant of Mr. Feld. He had always been responsible for bringing the trainers from Europe to the Greatest Show on Earth, but now suddenly Mr. Feld announces to Mr. Rhodin that he has hired a guy and his wife to work and train animals. This was upsetting to Mr. Rhodin at that time.

I think Mr. Feld probably did that by design, I think he was very happy to tell Mr. Rhodin; "Hey, Trolle I got a trainer right here from America."

But anyway we went there, but because of those things it was difficult. We weren't accepted, it was very difficult. The Williams contingent didn't care much for us being there. Rhodin was not happy with us for being there. But Mr. Feld, himself, was very happy with us and the job we did. In fact, the first year he gave my

wife a very sizable bonus over and above her salary for the number of acts she presented in the show. He was more than pleased with the work that I did. As far as Irvin, we could do no wrong. And we did do our job well.

After the first year, then I could see the difficulty on the Red Unit, and I asked to be transferred to the Blue unit. I knew the horse trainer, Franz Altof, was going back to Germany and that there would be an opening there. Irvin didn't want to do that. I don't know why, but he wanted me to stay with the Red Unit. I almost begged him.

"Nah, Nah, you stay with Gunther there."

They hired Billy Baker to be the horse trainer on the Blue Unit. They brought him in from the Tihany Circus in South America. But he had never worked a big twelve horse liberty act, and they had a twelve horse liberty act on the Blue show and there were only eleven horses. They needed to replace some horse in the act as well.

I would go to Rhodin and say: "Why don't you tell Mr. Feld that I'm the guy they need there. I could put that twelve horse act together and get it going." So finally, finally clear heads prevailed and they switched me to the Blue Unit. They transferred Baker to the Red unit and I taught him to work the animals I worked on the Red Unit. So then I went on the Blue show.

Unfortunately, Jack Joyce had been let out as performance director, a very capable man and a good trainer. But for political reasons he was let out after running it for a couple of years as performance director. Before that he had been there working horses and had his camel act booked there and so on.

So they said, "Well we are going to transfer you to the Blue Show, but we want you to be the performance director." Charlie Bauman had been the assistant to Jack Joyce and they were going to have Charlie Bauman be my assistant.

I said to Allen Bloom and Mr. Feld: "I don't think that Charlie Bauman will accept that." I had been with the company for only a year and Charlie Bauman had been there for twelve or fourteen years trying to work into this position.

"Well no, we have talked to him and he will accept it."

I said, "Well, I don't know, I don't think so, I don't really believe that."

"No, No this is the way it is going to be."

So we went into rehearsal, and Richard Barstow was the stage director from New York, and he had been doing it for nineteen years. Here I am, a Johnny come lately and Mr. Barstow resented me in that position and certainly Charlie Bauman did. So here I go again. Now I am back in a can of worms that I don't want to be in. As rehearsals progressed, Barstow could be very difficult in the best of times. He would scream and yell and carry on, but he always got the job done. He got into a big argument with me. It was just a big mess. So I walked out. I quit.

They tried to settle it. Mr. Bloom came and asked me to hang in there.

Anyway, I quit. Mr. Feld said: "No, No you stay with the show and you make sure the spec goes on." But they put Charlie Bauman in as performance director which he was happy to have.

I remained with the show. I got along fine with Charlie Bauman then. He was more than happy. They never cut my salary. I continued on. During those times with Ringling, and we had young children and they were in elementary school, and you are on the road forty some weeks.

The first year we drove overland with the house trailer. Well, that was difficult. So then Mr. Feld was very gracious and he gave us a wonderful facility with the circus train. We tried that. My God, you go to the building with the kids in the morning or early afternoon.

Now they got to hang out in the dressing room, hang in the building all day because the performances were like four and eight. Between shows you couldn't go anywhere. Now it would be eleven thirty at night. We finally arrive back to our stateroom on the train. My wife would try to cook for the kids and they would fall asleep at the table eating or they wouldn't want to eat. So it was not a healthy way to raise a family. We thought about it and thought about it. It just was not right. So at the end of the season with the Blue show we resigned. We thought that this is not good. We were leaving the children with my mother-in-law. Thank God, she was an elementary school teacher in Ohio. She would keep them there and then when we got into winter quarters the kids would come down. Then they had to go back to school with her. It just didn't work out.

We had bought a home in Sarasota. My wife stayed home and I made a deal to go with the Royal Lipizzaner Stallions show with my high school horse. I had this beautiful saddle bred horse named American Anthem. The Lashinsky family at that time was the promoters and owners of the Royal Lipizzaner Stallions. It was a big successful thing. They had a sixteen piece orchestra and they had almost every great high school act in America there. The Smaha family, the Bale family, Frido Pastor and Alva Austermeier. It was a great show.

Lashinsky booked me with my saddle-bred as the principal, too. I went on that show with the idea that I would spend the season there. We opened in Jacksonville, Florida in January. I got to Convention Hall and I rode my horse out one night and he started limping. Oh, my God. So the veterinarian diagnosed navicular disease in his front foot, which would make him chronically lame. So we put him on a medication, which is like a aspirin for horses. But it was trying to see the poor guy and know that he had navicular disease. On the Lipizzaner show you worked on Celotex, which is a hard floor. For the Spanish trot and the movements he did, it was really hard on him.

Hoxie Brothers Circus wintered in Miami, Hoxie Tucker came to see the Lipizzaner Show. I had visited his show that summer with the Blue show, while driving overland with the Ringling show. He had six young baby elephants, four Asian and two Africans, he wanted trained.

So I called him and told him I couldn't continue on with the Lipizzaner Show. My horse is lame. I made a deal and I went with him and went to winter quarters and trained these six elephants. He booked me and my wife. We are now back in the old mud show business. The kids could stay in school up until time to open and we closed in October and we could get them back in school. It was a healthier way of life for us, so we went with Hoxie Brothers Circus.

Herriott with mixed liberty drill on Ringling Red Unit, 1970. Pfening Archives.



Friends Remember Fred Pfening

Remembering Pfred

Over two months have passed since Fred Pfening, Jr. was laid to rest. Or, as I always think of him, The Great Pfred. Though that moniker is usually attributed to me, I did not coin it. "Pfred" came from his great and true friend, the late Tom Parkinson. The late Joe Bradbury told me that (Nowadays, "late" describes altogether too many of my long-time friends.).

I knew Fred for fifty-four years, and consider him among my very best friends. We meet on March 14, 1956 at Joe Bradbury's house. Fred was en route to Sarasota from Columbus for the Circus Fans Association convention at the Orange Blossom Hotel there. He stopped over here that evening to visit Joe who invited me to come and join them. Fred was then just thirty years old (two weeks



At the CHS convention in Bloomington, Illinois, 7 September 2000, l. to r. Pfening, son Fred III, Richard Reynolds, Joe Bradbury. All four were CHS Presidents.

from 31). I was all of twenty-one and a first year law student at Emory University.

One thing I recall clearly from that meeting. Fred asked me if I was planning to see the latest hit star. He was talking about Elvis Presley who was about to perform at Atlanta's Fox Theater. That told me how well informed Fred was about entertainment matters. I knew about Elvis only generally and said "no." However, by the following summer Elvis-mania had so gripped the nation that I wanted to see what all the fuss was about. So, on June 24, 1956, I went to see him in person at Atlanta's Paramount Theater. What a "circus" with the pulchritude in a screaming frenzy over Elvis's gyrations while performing "Blue Suede Shoes," and "Hound Dog."

I first met Fred III in 1966. Right here I need to say that I have a hard time using the more formal names "Fred," or "Fred III" by which he now is known. He will always be "Rick" to me. It comes from the end of his given name, FrederIC. So with that being said and to avoid confusion between the two "Freds," I will refer to the 3rd hereafter as "Rick."

I traveled to Columbus on September 15, arriving about the same time as fellow CHS Trustee Alan Campbell. We reached the funeral home where Fred's visitation took place a few minutes after 4:00 pm. Fred's casket was closed and adorned with a folded American flag. Rick was surprised and genuinely glad to see Alan and me. All things considered, Lee, Fred's widow, was ok. She is actually four years older than Fred and has been in poor health in recent years. She was in a wheel chair and was looked after by a professional caregiver, a very attractive, kind and friendly young woman. Lee greeted everyone warmly and was genuinely grateful that we were all there.

In the large parlor where the visitation was held were several flat screen TV monitors. They showed, on a rotating basis, photos of Fred from various stages of his life. One that garnered a lot of attention and comment showed a grinning Fred with the beautiful Marilyn Monroe displaying her trademark million dollar smile. The photo was taken at Niagara Falls during the making of the movie *Niagara*.

Fred knew Hollywood actress Jean Peters, who also starred in the film, from their college days at The Ohio State University in the late 1940s. Several times when Fred was in Los Angeles on business, he visited Peters at Twentieth Century-Fox Studios. They lunched together at the studio commissary. She once introduced Fred to famed producer Darryl F. Zanuck. In 1957 Jean Peters married the eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes.

There were other notable photos—Fred in his military uniform at the prestigious Culver Military Academy, which he attended in the summer of 1937. Another showed him in his United States Army uniform. Fred, like almost every male who was graduated from high school in 1943, was summoned for military duty. He had, however, flat feet so he got discharged. There was also a picture of Fred in his Ohio State cheerleader's uniform, megaphone in hand, urging the Buckeyes to victory.

The highlight of the proceedings was provided by Steve Freese and David SaLoutos from Circus World Museum. They had left Baraboo at 4:00 am on the morning of the 15th, drove the 550 miles to Columbus, and arrived at the funeral home about an hour into the visitation. But they just didn't bring themselves, no, they were in a pickup truck pulling a short flatbed trailer onto which was loaded Cole Bros. wagon no. 82, which now has an air calliope inside. Prior to Cole it had been on Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus in the late 1920s.

It pulled up alongside the entrance to the funeral home. Dressed in a red hat and a white band uniform coat embellished with bars of gold cord across the front, SaLoutos played it throughout the remainder of the visitation. The next morning he did the same at the private internment service. The calliope, still on its trailer, was then taken to the church and parked at curbside in front of the main

Circus World Museum's David Saloutos playing the Cole Bros. air calliope outside the funeral home during Pfening's visitation, 15 September 2010. Steve Freese photo.



entrance. SaLoutos played it as folks filed in for the service. What a fitting tribute to old Pfred.

After the visitation Rick hosted a dinner for those of us circus followers who had traveled to Columbus for an overnight stay. It was at the prestigious Columbus Club, which is housed in a huge brownstone house built in 1851 near the Ohio State House. The Club was a favorite haunt of Fred Jr.'s. He headed the Club's committee that saw to the food preparation. He hired the chef and talked many times to me about how they worked to offer the finest fare. The chef greeted us when we entered as did the Club's manager.

Fred was a true gourmet, a member *Chaîne des Rôtisseurs*, the renowned international gastronomic society. The two of us truly enjoyed one another's company over fine food and wine. Some of our most notable dining pleasures were had at the Grenadier, the English Room at the Pfister, Karl Ratzsch's, and Sanford, all in Milwaukee (the first two are now closed—the last named just about the finest anywhere); Gotham Bar & Grill and Café des Artistes in New York City; Bijou Café and Francoise and Henri's in Sarasota (the latter now closed); Las Canarias in San Antonio; L'Antibes in Columbus, where the chef would prepare a chocolate soufflé especially for Fred; and Truffles in Toronto's Fours Seasons Hotel (that one is also now closed). The Great Recession has shuttered many fine restaurants.

At the Columbus Club, we were in a private dining room, and it was indeed a fine meal with selections from a comprehensive menu. I enjoyed a tomato bisque and Dover sole. Old Fred would have been proud of me. We were seated at a large square table. Those in attendance, in addition to Rick, were: Alan Campbell and

At the 2004 CHS convention in Nyack, New York, l. to r. Jennifer Miller, Pfening, and CHS President Al Stencell. Paul Gutheil photo.



Cover of the first issue of *Bandwagon* edited by Pfening in 1961.

myself from Atlanta; Fred Dahlinger from Baraboo; Martha and John Polacsek from Detroit; Ken Harck from Chicago; Dick Flint from Baltimore; Steve Freese and David SaLuotos from the Circus World Museum in Baraboo; and Debbie Walk from the Ringling Museum in Sarasota. In addition there were three folks from Columbus, John and Mardi Wells, editors of *White Tops*, the magazine of the Circus Fans Association; and Jim Baker, a Columbus-based consultant who worked on Ringling in the summers from the late 1940s through 1956.

I must interject here that Delia and I were privileged and honored to be among the guests at the Columbus Club on May 30, 1997 when Fred and Lee celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary there.

I was also Fred's luncheon guest on several occasions at the Scioto Country Club, well known for being the place where Jack Nicklaus cut his teeth on the links. The first time Fred took me there in July 1990 he drove me in his Rolls-Royce. It was not his everyday car but he used it then, and I felt honored by it.

The service at First Community Church the next morning was a fine tribute to and sendoff for old Pfred. There were three eulogists, Nelson French, Joseph Berwanger, and Rick. French went to school with Fred all the way from grammar through high school. He said that Fred's nickname in high school was "Ferd," close to Tom Parkinson's later "Pfred." Berwanger, a retired Columbus insurance man, talked about Fred in a business and philanthropic context. Rick related a number of stories about his father.

Fred Dahlinger delivered the Final Reflection, a reading of John Herriott's "Old Showman's Heaven."

The Rev. Richard Wing gave the homily and it was a fitting tribute to a man who loved life without any pretensions and was a genuine friend to many, regardless of their stations in life. He wanted it known that Fred did not give any instructions about how his funeral was to be conducted, save for one thing. He wanted fine food offered afterwards.

So, when the service was over, all were invited into a large adjoining assembly area to mix and mingle and enjoy a great spread, catered by Fred's beloved Columbus Club. Alan and I were there only briefly because we had early afternoon flights. But we were able to say farewells to the family. Brian Russell, the CHS's accountant, was there and it was good to connect with him again.

And so it came to an end. I am reminded of the phrase that Fred most often used when terminating a conversation—one that Rev. Wing also recalled—namely, "Carry on." And, so we go forward, confident that we will never again meet anyone quite like the Great Pfred himself. *Richard J. Reynolds III, former President of the Circus Historical Society.*

Bandwagon—My Favorite Desert Island Library

There is no legacy that better represents Fred D. Pfening, Jr. than the 293 issues of *Bandwagon* that he edited. If I were marooned on a desert island, my *Bandwagon*

file is the one item I'd want to have with me. Since the present series began in May 1957, Fred produced 91% of them.

Fred's gift was his eagerness to share the resources about the circus and its history that he so loved. Whether it was as an editor cajoling a contributor to write, or the delight he took in supplying information to a writer, or gathering images to illustrate an article, his remarkable collection seemed only a means to an end. He was also the creator of some of those collectibles, having published four fine



At the 1992 Great Circus Parade, Milwaukee with two of his dearest friends, l. to r. Pfenning, historians Chappie Fox, and Tom Parkinson. John Goodall photo.

route books for the Cristiani and Beatty-Cole circuses.

My first contact with the Pfenings was through the then dean of circus historians, Richard Conover of Xenia, Ohio. Hardly even a teenager, I had started to correspond with

Mr. Conover who knew that Fred's son Rick was just a year younger than I and just as interested in the pre-Civil War circus as I was. Later, during semester break of my freshman year in college, I flew to spend a few days at the Conovers and both Pfenings drove down in Fred's black Cadillac for a visit and my first meeting with them. Rick and I became great friends beyond our circus interests.

Actually, my first contact with Fred was earlier, shortly after I received my very first issue of *Bandwagon*, the July-August 1960 issue that featured some delightful color cover artwork by Bill Balantine (Fred was not yet editor of our esteemed journal but I later learned that he had a role in this first color cover.). The back cover, however, had a full page ad for Fred's "Circusiana Mart" listing duplicate programs, posters, route books, couriers, and letterheads for sale. After some time considering just what I wanted, I decided to order a Barnum & Bailey color courier that was only \$3.50. Of course, by the time my order arrived, the item was sold and Fred had to return the check (my mother's, since I was but 12 years old). More than a decade later when I first stayed at his Dorset Road home for a visit, Fred produced my letter scrawled out on Boy Scout stationery.

If I was unsuccessful in that small acquisition, Fred was generous to me years later when he acquired the great collection of "Baraboo Bill" Kasiska. Fred understood my serious research interests and I was able to skim the cream of the route books in that fabulous hoard that were duplicates to Fred's already great collection. I had previously gathered a good group of these richly informative resources, but nearly 100 rare route books from Cooper & Bailey through the 1930s—literally any I did not have—were acquired by me before Fred issued his sales list of duplicate circusiana from the Kasiska collection (believe me, what was left for sale was still a great collection by itself!). However, in later years as I look over Fred's great list, there are just a few posters and letterheads that I wish I'd bought just for their sheer beauty but my focus, quite rightly at the time, was on outstanding research resources. Fred's kind favor to me was typical of the man and I know that others benefited from similar gestures over the years.

In 1972 I was hired by Chappie Fox to work for the summer

at the Circus World Museum arranging and assembling prints of every negative in the library's great collection in photographic albums. For me, it was a great learning experience to work with classic images by Harry Atwell or rare views taken by Charles Puck. That job was available because Fred decided to fund the printing of every negative in the collection in order that they would be more readily available to researchers and to readers of *Bandwagon*. My roundabout drive from Massachusetts west to Baraboo that spring took me to both Sarasota for the first time and to Columbus, Ohio. I stayed at the Pfenings' home and it was then that I first saw the basement office that housed both the Pfening collection and the production center for *Bandwagon*. I remember a six-foot shelf of light brown photo albums housing Burt Wilson's extensive photo collection, an important source for illustrating many *Bandwagon* articles. And there were a couple of four-drawer file cabinets stuffed with programs, couriers, American Circus Corporation correspondence, and other treasures.

I was far more active in the CHS from the 1970s through to my tenure as president in the mid-1980s. While president, I was intent on expanding the appeal and attendance of CHS conventions. One innovation was the initiation of an annual auction to benefit the coffers of the CHS and increase the number of pages we could print in *Bandwagon*. I remember just how supportive Fred was in helping to launch a trend that has continued for some 25 years. Until others became steady contributors, Fred supplied many items including a hoard of posters he acquired from the Ted Deppish collection. Depish had the habit of stamping his name on the face of his posters



At the 1993 CHS convention in Nashville, l. to r. Pfenning, Ringling-Barnum executive Tim Holst, historians Fred Dahling, and John Polacsek.

and Fred, not having the heart to sell them through his mail order Circusiana Mart, concluded that our auction, where buyers could see what they were getting, was a good and fair way to distribute the posters.

During my four years as CHS president (1982-85), Fred was always supportive—especially in reminding me of *Bandwagon* deadlines for which he was a stickler. He had taken over editorship in the fall of 1961 after the magazine had experienced numerous delays in its publication cycle. The final straw for him was when the July-August issue had a blank back page. While Fred told the membership that "There are reasons for the delays," but since he wasn't one to belabor old problems, he then simply explained that "that is in the past and nothing will be gained by excuses at this time." He noted CHS membership had tripled in the previous four years and explained that for many, *Bandwagon* was their only contact with the organization. He didn't mention, however, that the rapid growth



Cigar in hand, Pfening poses with John Herriott, horse and elephant trainer, cr. 1975.

of the organization had occurred since he had become president on a platform to rejuvenate the CHS as a true historical organization. He worked hard as the new editor to line up historical material from Joe Bradbury, Tom Parkinson, Richard Reynolds, Chang Reynolds and others whose names soon graced the bylines of many informative and well-illustrated articles in the coming decades. He created wonderful themed double-page spreads—perhaps echoes of his college days as an editor—of posters he'd recently acquired from Burt Wilson, or picture spreads on circus baseball teams, to give two examples. Those early years of his editorship were a great source of learning for a young circus enthusiast such as me. I remember hurrying home from school near the end of every other month hoping *Bandwagon* had arrived. I'd devour those issues and to this day every page is firmly imprinted on my memory and in reviewing them again recently, not one was foreign to me.

It wasn't too many years later that I contributed my first article to *Bandwagon*, a detailed biography I had begun on the life of Rufus Welch, an early menagerie and circus showman. It dealt with a time period almost a century earlier than most *Bandwagon* articles—a real test of Fred's ability to gather illustrations—and carried a long series of footnotes that were the first submitted with a *Bandwagon* article. That was a challenge to Fred in laying out the pages. He was apologetically insistent that they couldn't go at the foot of each page but they were assembled instead as endnotes. As a nervous young writer, I was just glad to see the piece in print!

Fred enjoyed but did not flaunt his pleasures—fine dining and good cigars among them. He was a modest but effective community leader and benefactor. Aside from splurging on two Rolls Royces, he never flaunted his wealth. The home in which he lived for sixty years, near the neighborhood where he grew up, revealed only a moderately comfortable life, not one of extravagance. While he

hobnobbed with civic and business leaders in the elegant confines of the Columbus Club, he found equal comfort in consorting with elephant handlers on muddy lots—and he did not hide his passion for the circus from his professional or community contacts.

If other circus fans perceived him as a big collector, possession was not his priority. The purpose of his collecting was almost solely for illustrations for the *Bandwagon* and as a resource for fellow researchers. He was intensely dedicated to the CHS, even gathering a small group of CHS friends to temporarily underwrite the organization in the 1960s as it faced a brief financial crisis. Nor would he speak ill of the person who caused the crisis for Fred believed only in moving forward.

As recounted at Fred's funeral, one of his typical expressions, if he received satisfactory answers after a series of quick, probing questions, was "Carry on." He wanted to make sure that all was on track, that the show would open as announced on the posters. Often times the response was accompanied by a Groucho Marx type wink of the eyebrows, sort of a humorous "okay, aren't we having fun" manner that reflected his own life. Fred Pfening was extremely generous in many ways and he will be missed. *Richard W. Flint, former President of the Circus Historical Society.*

The Editor

Photos were a stock and trade of Fred's legendary editorship of *Bandwagon*. As a late-comer to his stable of authors, I anxiously awaited to see my stories in print—not because of my penmanship, but primarily to see the range of impressive photos that Fred retrieved from his extensive archives. I had never seen many of the circus folks mentioned in the articles, so I was like a kid in a candy store when my latest edition of *Bandwagon* arrived in the mailbox. He often sent me research documents from his files to shed light on events previously unpublicized. Fred was always an encourager, and he had the most polite but effective way of prompting a writer to "turn loose of the story." In other words he was saying "stop dawdling and get back to your PC. I've got another deadline coming up." The circus has lost a true friend and cheerleader. *Lane Talburt, frequent Bandwagon contributor.*

At the 1981 Chicago circus parade presented by Circus World Museum, l. to r. showman Ward Hall, former director of the Hertzberg Circus Collection Leonard Farley, Tom Parkinson, Pfening, and photo collector Gordon M. Potter.



Fred

I met Fred D. Pfening Jr. on July 6, 1967, after the banquet of the Circus Historical Society convention in the Elks Club at Baraboo, Wisconsin. Though I had already been in correspondence with his son Fred III, we were both too shy to approach the other. The elder Fred, who had ascertained my identity from others (there weren't too many teenagers in attendance then, either), brought "Rick" over and said "You guys better talk now because you're going home tomorrow," or words to that effect. He then walked away, knowing we would cover a lot of ground, two teens with a shared passion. It facilitated discussion like nothing else. After a bit Fred III provided an introduction to the legendary Richard E. Conover. Little did I then realize the transformative impact that Fred Jr.'s single kind act would have on my life. In retrospect, he was always facilitating good things by taking action in his inimitable ways. He was "salt of the earth" in how he made everything better with his presence.

I started to read the *Billboard* on microfilm in the summer of 1969, while returning home from a day job across town. The bus transfer took place near the downtown branch of the Milwaukee Public Library, enabling me to fit in an hour of hurried scanning and scribbling before having to leave for home. The many revelations discovered therein enabled me to update a primitive list of steam calliopes that vexed my mind and filled letters to friends with innumerable questions. By the end of the summer I thought that



With Chief Clarence Keys and old movie cowboy Tim McCoy on Kelly-Miller in 1957. Keys was canvas boss on Pfening's Fred J. Mack Circus in 1955. Pfening became friends with McCoy while writing a history of the Colonel's ill-fated 1938 Wild West show.

I'd learned enough to compose an article. Fresh from a senior term paper, I thought I knew how to write. I sent it to Fred and he kindly advised shortly before I left for college that it was going to appear in the next issue of *Bandwagon*. Fred made me a published author. It was a true highlight of my young life.

In the years after college there were many hours shared with Fred in Baraboo and Milwaukee during circus train and parade time, on his home turf in Columbus, or wherever the CHS convention was taking place. He was always seeking, meeting, introducing, encouraging and making things possible. The Energizer Bunny would have had difficulty keeping up with him as he expanded his own knowledge of the circus, while simultaneously seeking more material for his beloved *Bandwagon*. That ceaseless searching nur-

tured it into the top journal in the field, with an international following. It was fueled by his genuine appreciation for people, both those in the business and the rest of us who were awed and amazed by the three ring world. I often had the opportunity to look over his shoulder as he "worked the crowd," learning techniques and gathering pointers on the style that made him so successful.



Pfening and Howard Tibbals during construction of the Tibbals Learning Center at the Ringling Art Museum in Sarasota, Florida, 2005.

I was privileged to submit a number of articles for publication in *Bandwagon*, which always brought forth good exchanges. Often they were accompanied by gems that Fred discovered to augment what I'd learned on a topic. The jewels in his collection never ceased to amaze and he was always generous in making them available for use. When I had the opportunity to publish several books, Fred graciously welcomed me to select numerous great pieces for publication outside his own favored domain.

After taking a position in the Circus World Museum library at Baraboo my contact with Fred increased. He funded many improvements, including albums that made it possible for researchers to learn the contents of the photographic negative collection. More than any other individual, he enabled numerous circus photos to go into print and onto screens. He has never received proper recognition for that pre-Internet distribution enhancement project.

Knowing that more remained to be done, Fred also established an endowment to fund aspects of both the library and the museum. Many of his dollars went to acquire rarities that were found on eBay during the early days of that operation. They have substantially enhanced the ephemera and photography holdings.

Fred was a true gourmet, in all ways, whether food, wine or convivial hosting. He enlivened each and every gathering with knowledge so vast that sommeliers would ask for his guidance. I personally witnessed such things at the Scioto Country Club and other highbrow places that I'd have never patronized of my own accord. Fred made it possible. One particular dinner in the English Room of the Pfister Hotel with Fred, son Fred III and Stuart Thayer stands out as a cherished event of my young life.

Friend, mentor, collaborator, it was an honor and a privilege to know this great man. *Fred Dahlinger, Jr., former President of the Circus Historical Society.*

Remembering My Friend Fred

I don't remember when I first met Fred Pfening. I first started playing the Ohio State Fair in Columbus in 1973, and I expect that was when I met Fred.

Over the years that I worked there, Fred and I became close friends and generally managed lunch or dinner a couple of times each year. In more recent years I tried to attend all the CHS conventions. Fred was always there and we had great times together. Over time we developed a lot of inside jokes which provided many laughs.

Sometimes I made speeches at CHS. I always started with: "I don't do research. Anything I tell you is according to my memory. I don't claim that it is accurate. When I am mistaken, please interrupt and correct me because I also want to know what is correct." A couple of my friends would delight in correcting me. Fred could have done so many times, but wouldn't so I could save face. Such was the kindness he always showed to everyone.

Fred was a close friend of Richard Reynolds who was his companion at the conventions, and I would dine with them. I enjoyed the great sense of humor they shared. I appreciate the knowledge and wisdom I gained from both of them.

In more recent times, I have also become close to Rick and his wife Janet. I owe the Pfenings many thanks for the many wonderful things they have done for me, the many joyous times spent with them, and all the delicious cookies Janet baked. *Ward Hall, doyen of sideshow impresarios and noted gourmand.*

Memories of Pfred

I still have some terrific old posters that I bought from Circusiana Mart for two dollars or less back in the fifties.

I had corresponded with the great man for years before actually meeting him in 1966 in that most auspicious of locations, namely inside Ringling-Barnum ticket wagon #123 where he and Chappie Fox had holed up against the heat of the Milwaukee lakefront parade grounds. I believe an air conditioner had been rigged up and I seem to recall the faint tinkle of ice.



With circus executive and route expert Ted Bowman at the 1995 CHS convention in San Antonio.

Fred was always super nice to me and seemed oblivious to the fact that I looked up to him mightily. You might say he had made his bones while I was dating cheerleaders. The early spring of 1967 I found myself in Columbus and Fred and Lee were nice enough to have me over for supper with themselves and their boys, and of course I had a look through



Paul Ingrassia was often Pfening's dinner companion. They are depicted here at the 2005 CHS convention in Baltimore. Ed Limbach photo.

Fred took me to dinner a few days later in "the Boo" and later he took me to drinks at the Elks Club after the CHS convention ended. I remember ordering "Black Label," which to a boy from the olde South means Jack Daniels pride and joy, and I was shocked when the barkeep handed me a glass of Johnny Walker. It was there that Fred first asked me about writing a piece about billing for his beloved *Bandwagon*. Over the years I contributed several such and he always thanked me profusely.

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the cellar where the goodies were kept. Shortly afterward Fred and I made our first of many trades involving circus material, with my getting some nice Beatty material from his archives.

In 1967 Mel Miller suggested to the CHS powers that be that I might manage to get by as secretary and so I was nominated at the convention, which is the way it was done in those days. One of the first things Mr. Pfening did after my election was to tell me to stop calling him Mr. Pfening and just call him Fred. It was an impressive gesture to this urchin from the streets of East Nashville. Of course he and I stayed in close contact during my years in office and when I got married in 1969 Pfred sent me as a wedding gift several nice Clyde Beatty items. Boy, you don't find many friends like that!

My wife Mary Jane and I used to play through Ohio with the Hanneford show in the early seventies and we managed several great visits with the Pfening family. Lee was always so nice to Mary Jane while we boys played with our toys. In 1996 I went back in as secretary of the organization and Fred and I were again in touch on an almost daily basis. His phenomenal memory of everybody and everything about the association was invaluable to me time and again.

I treasure the memories of jackpots and dinners during the conventions with Fred and Rick, Stuart Thayer, Richard Reynolds, Al Stencell and others. We also shared times of family illness and death and we came to know him as a kind and compassionate family friend. The last time we talked, just a few days before his death, he asked about Mary Jane's Alzheimer's and said he would keep us in his prayers. Of course he was always in ours and his passing came as a hard blow to me and to countless friends both in the circus and in the circus historical community.

God bless him and may he rest in Peace. *Dave Price, former Secretary-Treasurer of the Circus Historical Society.*

Fred Pfening, a Great Guy!

Fred Pfening could have been the best man I have ever known. We met fifty years ago in South Bend, Indiana at a Circus Historical Society Convention. The Beatty Show with Clyde performing made me the happiest first of May in existence. Fred treated me as a new friend and happily shared his extraordinary knowledge and his many friendships. He encouraged others to respect my new found passion and, like with him, that trip and the many that followed, fed the fervor that has consumed much of my life. Throughout the years Fred and I met occasionally and then more frequently as each of us came to enjoy additional prosperity and freedom. It was several years before I came to know of his large industrial company and his apparent attendant wealth. One of his most endearing qualities was his modest sense of himself and his position. I had assumed he was another of the guys, which is exactly how he wished to be treated. He was in a large measure responsible for my welcome to the newly created Circus World Museum and to Chappie Fox and John M. Kelly. We often joined together in building CWM into a strong and vital institution.

Fred, known for his generosity in the circus world, was always ready to help those in need. He understood the economic fragil-

ity of the business from his brief Fred J. Mack Circus ownership. Throughout the years he asked me to join him in participating in several of these projects that he quietly lead.

We got older and saw each other more frequently. We shared the fun and amusement that seemed to surround shows and show folks. He generously introduced me to many. Fred knew everyone and it seemed they knew him. His forty-nine years as editor of *Bandwagon* had led him to an almost unrivaled acquaintance with circus folk and their histories. He was well known as one of America's greatest circus historians. Happily, his son Rick (Fred III) also understandably has become a superb circus historian and helped often with getting the magazine out. Fred was always proud that Rick and I and others helped to successfully rebuild CWM in the eighties.

Fred had a couple of happily looney personal traits. In the days before microchips, any telephone call with him would be unbelievably brief as he would insist that it was "costing money." He would visit Sarasota in winter while I was there and we spent nearly every hour doing something circus-related. He refused to stay with me and preferred a third rate motel on the Tamiami Trail because he could save a few bucks a night and get a free breakfast. In contrast, to sate his well known passion for fine food and drink he often ordered a \$200 bottle of memorable French wine without giving it a second thought.

He went to Cuba a few years ago essentially to buy cigars! While in Florida we would chase show guys who may have forgotten to send a check for their *Bandwagon* Christmas ads. We'd get the check and likely spend hours listening to the season's stories.

What a man! To say he will be missed is to master understatement. Fred was a dear, sweet, generous and kind man. He understood human fragility and always forgave it. He knew that much of life can be joyous if we don't get too bogged down in the trash it can provide. I recall his big smile when I picked him up to go to a fancy Sarasota eatery as he asked, "Paulie, do think we can manage a bottle of La Montrachet '07?" Rest in Peace old friend. *Paul Ingrassia, former Board President, Circus World Museum, and noted wine connoisseur.*

Mr. Bandwagon

With regret, today I learned that long-time *Bandwagon* editor, Fred D. Pfening, Jr. passed away last night.

I knew he was ill. We sensed that his last season may have arrived. Nonetheless, he will be greatly missed. For 49 years, he edited the journal of the Circus Historical Society, a bi-monthly magazine that will forever be associated with his name and well-deserved reputation for excellence in honoring circus history through an unstinting fidelity to truth.

Perhaps more than any other soul, Pfening helped compile, edit and preserve an untold wealth of big top history and lore, and this he accomplished with a quiet respect for the subject he loved.

In recent times, I have particularly admired his courage to tackle some rather messy and unpleasant issues understandably sensitive

to many circus fans, among them, phone room operations and a reportedly organized short-changing operation among ticket sellers on the Ringling show, of all circuses, at least during its last two or three seasons under canvas. Not easy subjects to acknowledge, but Pfening took them head on. In the pages of *Bandwagon*, you can learn a thousand fascinating things about the tented cities that move by night.

Born Frederic Denver Pfening, Jr. in Columbus, Ohio on March 29, 1925, Pfening's labor of love came loaded with rich historical detail well documented, and from many back issues I have drawn during the all-important research phases for the books that I have written.

I can only hope and trust . . . that *Bandwagon* will continue on the same even path, daring to shed light on all aspects of circus history with the same steady resolve that editor Fred Jr. gave it.

Thank you and Farewell, Mr. *Bandwagon*. May your legacy live on in the Center Ring. *David Lewis Hammarstrom, prolific author and creator of the blog Showbiz David.*

Fred

Two things are certain in life: death and taxes. I would add a third to my life: Fred D. Pfening, Jr. standing at the exit each Sunday after the 11:00 A.M. service shaking my hand and asking, "Is everything well with you?" His sudden death floored those who knew him.

Fred was an ambassador for goodness. After his death and the great celebration of his life, I had not shed a tear, until last Sunday when I went to the sanctuary exit, and he was not there.

Fred was a philanthropist, edited a circus magazine that kept the memory of circuses alive, loved his clubs, was enamored by French food and wine, kept a family

company going, and was a faithful friend to many including myself. Lunch was our monthly ritual.

He was a lesson in friendship. At lunch we would discover that we agreed on little as related to politics and other things. But he was never disagreeable. He had opinions on everything. In time I started lunch by saying, "I'll bet you have a list of ideas you would like to share." He always did. I discovered that friendship stands outside the circle of agreement.

He was a lesson in prayer. His daily prayer life was important and always included his family, his circus friends and me. "More things have been wrought by prayer than the world will ever know," he would quote. He prayed as if everything depended on God and worked toward goodness as if it all depended on himself.

He was a man of benedictions. I knew our lunch was over when he said, "Well, carry on," and then stood up and headed for the door. He trusted that we would carry on the good he created by example. I hope his trust will not be in vain.

Fred knew that friendship was more important than ownership. He knew that what he kept he would lose, and what he gave is what he would have on the day we gathered in his memory.

May his like increase. Later, Fred. And thanks. *Dr. Richard Wing, Senior Minister, First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio.*



Pfening and Circus World Museum wagon-master Marv Gauger on one of the flats used to bring the museum's wagons to Milwaukee for the 1987 Great Circus Parade.

GENE CHRISTIAN ON HOW TO BOOK A CIRCUS

In the summer of 1959 CHS member Bill Elbirn wrote Roger Barnes, one of the owners of the Beers-Barnes Circus, offering to book the show in New Jerse, Elbirn's home state. Barnes passed the letter along to long-time Beers-Barnes agent Gene Christian, one of the great truck show bookers. Christian was interested and wanted to make sure Elbirn understood how to contract a town his way. He laid it all out for him in a letter full of insights about small towns, civic associations, negotiations, phone rooms and competition. The original of this letter is owned by Fred Hoffman who generously made it available for publication. Christian's wisdom of 27 July 1959 follows:

Dear Friend Elbirn: Roger Barnes, co-owner of Beers-Barnes Circus has just forwarded to me from Maine your interesting letter of July 15th in which you offer to help us contract some New Jersey Stands.

Mr. Barnes sent me the letter as it so happens that we are planning to route thru your state during the week or weeks beginning August 24, or several days sooner.

I will be working some Catskill, N.Y. towns this week, and by Saturday this week, or by Monday, Aug. 3, I expect to be picking up mail at Gen. Del., Port Jervis, N.Y., and thereafter enter N.J. from the north end and start beating the bushes for towns to make.

I talked with Harry Hunt of the Hunt show Saturday and he said he thought there would be five circuses in New Jersey late in August, including his. But since we can make towns smaller than any of our opposition shows, I feel that we should be able to get a few days to play.

I thought I would send you some guidance dope on this, however.

All but the Hunt show use phone selling. So we must keep a reasonable distance from their towns, even tho we can play near them much earlier than their date. They get their tickets sold early and in a wide area around and purchasers are not going to attend two circuses.

We cannot play towns of less than 1,000 population, but towns in the 1200-1500 bracket are not too small if lot is pretty well located and the town itself not too close to a big town, or big town that has had a circus. The more isolated the smaller town is the better our chances.

Sponsors always make more when they sell, as in selling they advertise [the circus]. It's not how many tickets they sell that counts. The front door percentage is nothing compared to any adv[ance] ticket sales effort, even if double percentage. But where you have a good little town with a good lot and a committee that are stubborn about not wanting to sell, give them 15% front door instead of 10% as shown on contract. And in unusual cases, where the town really looks very good, and the lot is very well located and nice like a centrally located school athletic field—give them 20% rather than lose it.

But the honest fact, between you and I (sic), is that they will make more selling and getting 10% front door. Another concession you can make—if they will make an effort to sell tickets, is to give them the regular adv[vance] sale percentages in contract plus 15% front door in place of ten percent.

Where they sell, we furnish posters like the enclosed so they can put them up in drug stores, gas stations, etc. where they put tickets on sale. I can ship tickets and these posters ahead to you, or bring them in as I get closer or in N.J. next week.

In blank space on posters they can put in name of town, lot, date and sponsored by etc.

Our Adv[vance] people arrive ten days ahead to get out the regular town and country billing.

Don't let any of your prospects presume to know that the date is too close, or that Saturday or Friday is the best day for the circus. They are always all wet and a great complication to routing a show. The best day to have it is Circus Day. Payroll day means nothing. People do not spend their last penny on payday, and people can't spend more than 1.50 on our lot if they sit in reserve seats, buy popcorn and a drink, and take in the animal exhibit, reptile exhibit and pony ride, each 10 cents each. So why complicate our routing for a Saturday.

Actually, Monday is the best day if you happen to have a friend in a committee or sponsor, but everyone outside of circus business believes its Saturday that's best. That's usually our worst day, but we can't adv[ertise] it as we have to fill Saturdays, too.

As for shortness of time—they never actually sell their first tickets until ten days in advance and we don't want more time as our adv[ance] gets stale. If they will let us run our circus business the way we learned how we will both come off better. We made all the mistakes and have all the expense after all. \$600 per day.

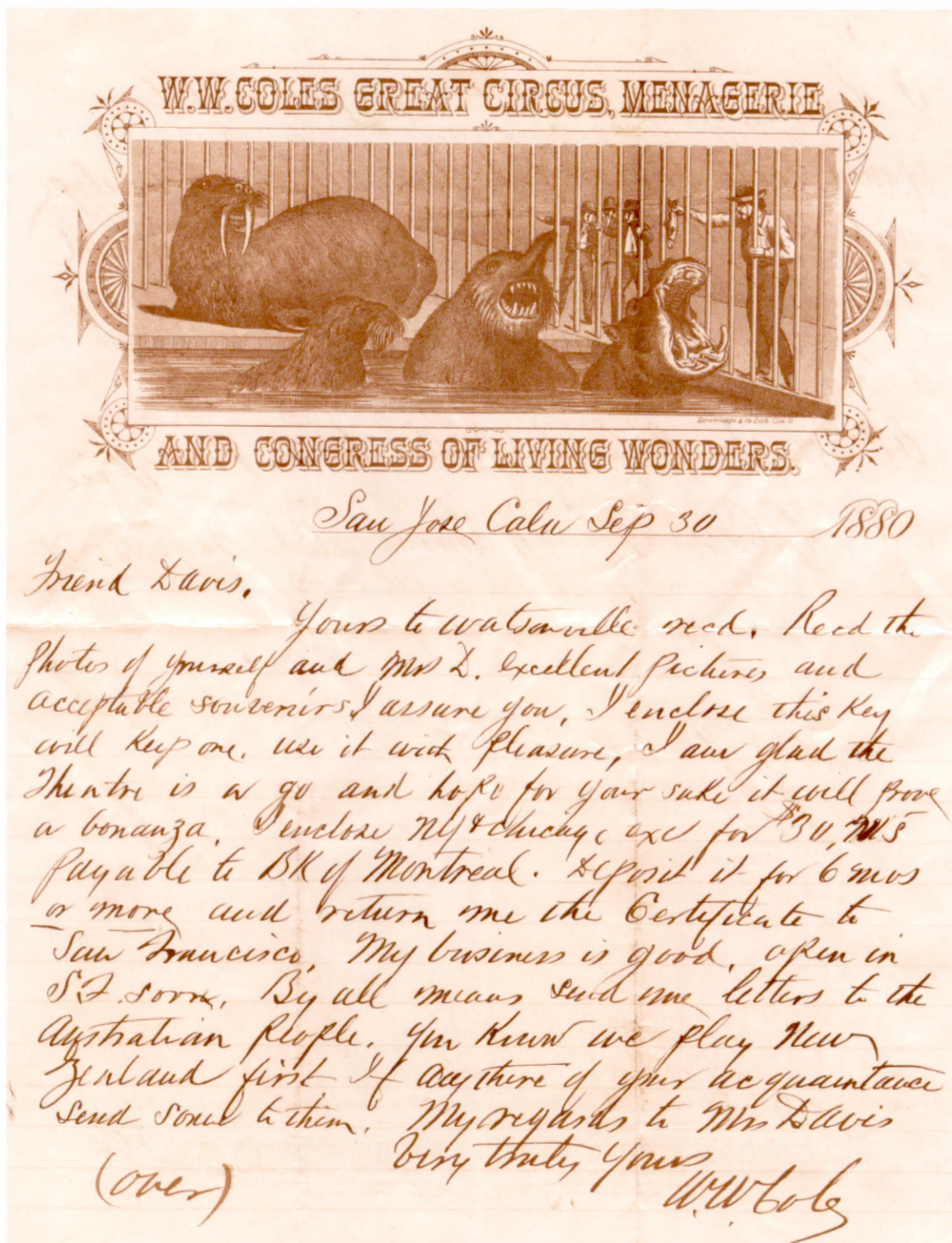
I am enclosing some sample contracts. I will sign them after I okay the lots, and return them a copy for their files. Try to make the date read "one day during the week of," to give us some latitude. When they pin us down to one date they might lose it.

Will be looking forward to hearing from you, also seeing you. My address after Port Jervis, N.Y. will be Gen. Del. Trenton, N.J. and the latter will be good for after Aug. 2nd. regards, Gene Christian, Advance Agent. Any questions—just ask. We seat about 1200—shows 2 and 8 pm. We have only 300 reserve seats—30 cents each. Two light plants—the lot can be as tight as 140 feet by 250 feet—water does not have to be right at lot.

Letterhead used by the Beers-Barnes Circus about the time Christian wrote Elbirn. It was designed by former Ringling-Barnum press agent and bill writer Roland Butler who made something of a cottage industry creating stationary for circuses.



Bill Kasiska's Letterheads



William Washington Cole was one of the most successful showmen in American history. Part of the way he earned his fortune was by taking his show into new territory. His was often the first circus in many western towns. This letter was sent from San Jose, California in late September 1880. This stationary was designed by Strobridge & Co. Litho of Cincinnati, Ohio.

FAMOUS ROBINSON SHOWS

